ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

THIRD SERIES

Margaret R. F. Allan.

1925

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

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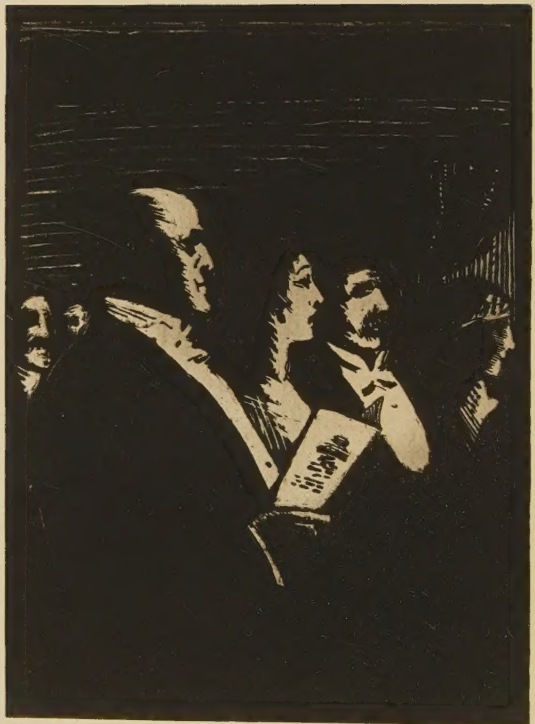

Nacht

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

THIRD SERIES

Selected by J. W. MARRIOTT

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FOREWORD

THIS third collection of *One-Act Plays of To-day* has been evoked by the success of its predecessors, and there is no longer any doubt that the one-act play has established itself with readers. But the modern one-act play is not confined to the armchair, to Matriculation students, or to the classroom. The more evident, indeed, becomes the determination of theatrical managers to banish this art-form from the London theatres, the more is it proved by amateur actors (whose challenge the professional theatre is at last acknowledging) that the West End of London is not the whole of England.

Both phenomena, in fact—professional neglect of, and amateur enthusiasm for, the one-act play—extend beyond these shores. Lately a " Conference of the Drama in American Universities and Little Theatres " was held at the Carnegie Institute at Pittsburg, and one would like incidentally to emphasize the linking which implies a unanimity of aim of drama in the universities with drama in Little Theatres. And to quote a salient passage from an address at that conference by Mr Harold Brighouse, who was visiting America, " The one-act play is the basic unit of the Little Theatres ; to-day it is in the Little Theatres alone that the one-act play receives attention and encouragement. From the Little Theatres, and by means of the one-act play, Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell emerged to national and international significance."

It may be added, in addition, that one-act plays are

used in the "Little Theatre Tournament" in New York (at which, under the auspices of the Drama League, an English 'team' competes), while the one-act play is as much neglected by professionals on Broadway as in Shaftesbury Avenue.

The twentieth century remarried literature with drama after a divorce of nearly a hundred years. But just as there are plays which are literary rather than dramatic, so there are plays of sound theatrical values which are not literary. The ideal balance between word and action is upset sometimes in the direction of too many words, sometimes in the direction of too violent action. The permanent difference of opinion between those who hold Shakespeare to be more poet than playwright and those who hold him to be more playwright than poet may be recalled. The perfect balance seems unattainable.

In making the present selection continuous regard, because of the acting vogue of the one-act play, has been paid to dramatic values. As a principle, a play should act better than it reads: plays are written for acting. None, one hopes, of the following examples will be read with disappointment; but all, since they are essentially good plays, will be found to act better than they read, and the student should visualize the acting—using imagination to project the third dimension which would appear on the real stage. The novelist and short-story writer can describe action which in the case of a printed play must be read 'between the lines.'

Simplicity, the keynote of the best modern work, will be found in the dozen plays in this volume. As in the first and second series, variety of type has been an aim; and Mr Farjeon's "Friends" represents that rare form, farce which is readable as well as actable, while the new sort of pastoral

play, a hardy growth despite the English climate, is exemplified in "How the Weather is Made." And if Cockney comedy ever found more poignant expression than in "The Dumb and the Blind" the editor has yet to discover it.

J. W. M.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The representatives of the late Harold Chapin for "The Dumb and the Blind"; Mr Harold Brighouse and Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., for "How the Weather is Made," from *Open-Air Plays*; Lord Dunsany and Messrs G. P. Putnam's Sons for "The Golden Doom"; Mr John Brandane for "Rory Aforesaid"; Miss Olive Conway and Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., for "Mimi," from *Costume Plays*; Mr W. B. Yeats and Messrs Macmillan and Co., Ltd., for "The Pot of Broth," from *Plays in Prose and Verse*; and the authors or their representatives and Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., for "The Master of the House," "Friends," "The Bishop's Candlesticks," "Between the Soup and the Savoury," "Master Wayfarer," and "A King's Hard Bargain."

CONTENTS

		PAGE
The Dumb and the Blind	*Harold Chapin*	13
How the Weather is Made	*Harold Brighouse*	31
The Golden Doom	*Lord Dunsany*	59
Rory Aforesaid	*John Brandane*	75
The Master of the House	*Stanley Houghton*	99
Friends	*Herbert Farjeon*	117
Mimi	*Olive Conway*	131
The Bishop's Candlesticks	*Norman McKinnel*	147
Between the Soup and the Savoury	*Gertrude Jennings*	167
Master Wayfarer	*J. E. Harold Terry*	189
The Pot of Broth	*W. B. Yeats*	221
A King's Hard Bargain	*Lt.-Col. W. P. Drury*	235

THE DUMB AND THE BLIND

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Harold Chapin

CHARACTERS

Joe Henderson, *of mud-barge* E 4
Liz, *his wife*
Emmy, *his daughter, aged twelve*
Tom, *his son, aged fourteen months*
Bill Pepper, *also of the mud-barge, his friend*

Produced for the first time on any stage by the Scottish Repertory Theatre Company, under the direction of Mr Alfred Wareing, at the Royalty Theatre, Glasgow, on Monday, November 20, 1911, with the following cast:

Joe	Frederick Lloyd
Liz	Elsie Davison
Bill	Eliot Makeham
Emmy . . .	Eugenie Gray

It is hardly debatable that the best Cockney comedy of our day was written by the late Harold Chapin, who, as has been explained in the Second Series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*, was technically an American citizen. Mayfair drama has many exponents and London drama few. Perhaps the best London play of the century is Miss Elizabeth Baker's "Chains"; Mr Neil Lyons's "London Pride" was a review of London in War-time rather than a play, and Mr McEvoy possibly takes the second place with "The Likes of 'Er."

In one-act plays "Makeshifts," by the late Gertrude Robins, and the tramp-sketch "The Doorway," by Mr Harold Brighouse, call for mention; but Harold Chapin's is the last word. The late William Archer held "The Dumb and the Blind" to be his best play: in its utter simplicity it is among the masterpieces of the one-act form.

THE DUMB AND THE BLIND[1]

SCENE: *A top room in a tenement-house in Bermondsey. The door opens on to the landing, across which is the bedroom. Through the open window—a large sash-window without curtains—can be seen an extensive panorama of smoking chimneys, dirty steeples, and telegraph-poles, silhouetted against a sky across which the neutral greys and warmer rose tints of a spring evening are creeping. Through this window a flood of dusty yellow sunlight illumines most of the room. The large kitchen table covered with a red cloth which stands in the window is full in this light. The linoleum-covered floor reflects it more remotely, and its farthest beams just reach the three rough chairs, which are in the course of conversion into a makeshift bed of childish proportions against the wall below the door. Other chairs are at the table: one above, one below, and one beside it facing the window.*

The fire is burning brightly behind a large threefold clothes-horse covered with wet linen, which, being semi-transparent, is converted by the flames into a luminous screen of flaming orange which dies to a dull red and leaps again to flame when the fire is replenished. In the shadows on either side of the fire are articles of furniture; a dresser,

[1] Published by Messrs Gowans and Gray, Ltd. (1s.). Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

poorly furnished with crockery but rich in undarned socks, novelettes, etc.; and an old chest of drawers.

A cheap alarum clock, ticking on the mantelpiece and just visible above the clothes-horse, points to something past five as the curtain rises, disclosing MRS HENDERSON *engaged in hanging the last of the wet linen on the horse, taking it from a zinc bath and wringing it with considerable strength.*

MRS HENDERSON *is a big, capable-looking woman of the labouring class. About thirty-six years of age, she is not uncomely, but equally not a beauty. Her dark hair is twisted into a knot at the back of her head and locked in unostentatious curl-papers around her forehead. She wears a dark skirt and a red blouse, open at the neck, the sleeves being rolled up above her elbows.*

From somewhere—a long way off—comes the monotonous reiteration of an incomplete set of chimes: three notes repeated again and again rhythmically and endlessly. Some one in the street below is calling "Any chai'ss tomen' or bar'ss tomen'?" at intervals of half a minute. His voice is fading away into the distance when a clatter of juvenile boots on the stairs heralds the approach of EMMY HENDERSON, *daughter of the house. The young lady enters swinging her school-bag, and crosses to the table, where she throws it down loudly. She is an ordinary Board School child of eleven or twelve: long black legs, slightly darned, and slightly in need of darning; short black skirt in need of lengthening; and blue blouse. Also pig-tails, boots, and a sailor hat.*

She addresses her mother reproachfully.

EMMY. Nice fing, Muvver! I dunno wot you did wiv vat compoun' multiplication.

MRS HENDERSON [*apprehensively*]. Were you kep' in for it?

EMMY [*incensed*]. Kep' in? . . . Didn't you never learn

compoun' multiplication, Muvver? [MRS HENDERSON *is too busy to reply.*] You went to school, didn't you?

MRS HENDERSON. 'F course.

EMMY. Well, wot did vey learn you?

MRS HENDERSON. Oh . . . all sorts o' things.

EMMY. Pity vey didn't learn you compoun' multiplication.

MRS HENDERSON [*with sudden authority*]. Nah, vat's enough of it.

[EMMY *is subdued. She opens her satchel and produces an exercise-book. Kneeling on chair by table she examines a page. Then, after a moment's struggle, curiosity triumphs.*

EMMY. Wot did you try to do wiv it?

MRS HENDERSON [*evasively*]. Oh, I dunno.

EMMY [*cuttingly*]. No more don't noboddy! Teacher kep' me arf an 'our trying to show 'er 'ow I'd done it; an' ven she kep' me anover 'arf tryin' to show me w'y it was wrong. [*Decisively*] I'll tell you wot it is, Muvver: you'll 'ave to take Tommy aht yourself of an evening nah I've got into compoun' multiplication.

MRS HENDERSON [*with a slight sigh*]. Alright.

EMMY [*compassionate but firm*]. Yes, I know you like to get rid of 'im for a bit w'en you've 'ad 'im all day, but I can't trust you wiv me 'ome-work like I used to, nah, can I?

MRS HENDERSON [*regretfully*]. No. [*She dries her hands on towel at door.*]

EMMY [*her good-nature getting the best of her*]. Tell you wot. I'll take Tommy aht on grammar nights. You're alright at parsin'.

MRS HENDERSON. Oh, yes.

EMMY. You used to be alright at arifmetic—but you must admit—compoun' multiplication——

MRS HENDERSON [*with another sudden access of authority*]. Nah, look 'ere, miss: if you say " compoun' multiplication "

to me again, I'll warm you, so mind. [*She attacks the make-shift bed, arranging the chairs and patting up the nondescript mattress. That done, she fetches from the chest of drawers a blanket and sheet.*]

EMMY [*reading these omens*]. Farver's night 'ome?

MRS HENDERSON [*returning with the bedclothes to the bed*]. Friday; don't you know it is?

EMMY. You needn't snap me 'ead off. 'E ain't always 'ome of a Friday.

MRS HENDERSON. Pretty near.

EMMY [*still watching the bed-making*]. 'E seems to be always comin' 'ome, don't 'e?

MRS HENDERSON. D'you mind?

[*A Cockney sarcasm, popular with the fair sex.*

EMMY. Well—I don't particularly *like* sleeping on free chairs.

MRS HENDERSON [*for consolation*]. It's only for a couple o' nights.

EMMY. Yes. [*Then reminiscently*] Muvver! Do you remember w'en we 'ad 'im 'ome for a 'ole week w'ile ve barge was bein' painted?

MRS HENDERSON [*in exculpation*]. Well, 'e 'adn't got nothin' to do then. A man always gets a bit irritable-like w'en 'e ain't got nothin' to occupy 'is mind.

EMMY. I don't see as 'e's got much to occupy 'is mind—muckin' abaht on a mud-barge.

MRS HENDERSON [*straightening her back*]. Nah, Miss 'Igh-an'-Mightiness, don't you get turnin' of your nose up at ve barge; it's kept us for nigh on ten years.

EMMY. Wiv your bit o' charing.

MRS HENDERSON [*at work again*]. 'F course.

EMMY [*after some thought*]. Muvver . . .

MRS HENDERSON. Wot?

EMMY. Wot did Farver do before 'e started on ve barge?

MRS HENDERSON. 'E looked for work.

EMMY. All the time?

MRS HENDERSON. Well, of course, 'e got dis'eartened sometimes w'en I was out of a place and couldn't give 'im nothin' to spend.

EMMY [*after a sniff*]. Muvver . . .

MRS HENDERSON [*parrying further questions*]. There's Tommy.

EMMY [*holding her ground*]. I've got me 'ome-work to do.

MRS HENDERSON. I'll——

EMMY [*warningly*]. It's compoun' multiplication.

MRS HENDERSON. I'll give you a note to the teacher.

EMMY [*shaking her head*]. It's a bad 'abit to get into.

MRS HENDERSON [*wearily*]. Oh, alright—disobliging——

[*Moves towards door.*

EMMY [*jumping down*]. No—alright, Muvver—I'll see to 'im for a bit. You'll 'ave to—[*she finishes the remark from the other side of the door*]—get me up early in ve morning to do it, vat's all.

[MRS HENDERSON *finishes making the bed. From the other room* EMMY *can be heard talking to the baby, and occasionally calling to her mother across the landing.*

EMMY [*off*]. 'Ullo, melord, 'n' how long 'ave you been awake for? Come on! [*A grunt as she lifts the baby.*] There we are! [*Calling*] Muvver!

MRS HENDERSON. Yes?

EMMY [*enthusiastically*]. Ain't 'is bump gettin' on alright? Can't 'ardly see it.

MRS HENDERSON. Good job for you it is, miss. Take better care of 'is 'ead another time. Dancin' about.

EMMY [*greatly offended*]. I wasn't dancin' about.

MRS HENDERSON. I suppose the lampost barged into you of itself?

EMMY [*triumphant*]. It wasn't a lampost, it was a tram-car, see? [*To the baby*] Nah ven—— [*Calling*] Where's 'is ovver shoe? [*To the baby*] W'ere's your ovver shoe, Tommy? Ain't et it, 'ave you? Oh, 'ere we are. [*Pause*] 'Ullo. [*Calling*] Muvver!

MRS HENDERSON. Well?

EMMY. 'Ere's Farver comin' upstairs.

MRS HENDERSON. Oh—ven if you'll wait 'arf a minute you can run aht for a pint.

[*A clumping of heavy feet on the stairs and a rough voice somewhere about the floor below.*

JOE [*below*]. Hullo.

EMMY [*just outside door*]. Hullo.

JOE. Wot are you 'avin' a game at? [*Pause*] 'Ullo, Tommy! 'Ullo, young feller-me-lad.

[*The heavy feet are ascending the stairs; two pairs of them.*

EMMY. Say "hullo" to Farver, Tommy, 'cos 'e only comes 'ome once a week.

JOE. Something like, ain't 'e?

[*A third voice*—BILL PEPPER'S—*replies.*

BILL [*off*]. Not 'arf.

[JOE HENDERSON *enters followed by* BILL PEPPER. *Both are barge-labourers: heavy-footed, ill-shaven*—JOE *wears a scrubby moustache—and roughly dressed in corduroys and heavy coats with red handkerchiefs around their necks.*

MRS HENDERSON. Hullo.

JOE [*not to be outdone in courtesy*]. Hullo. [*Then after a pause*] I've brought old Bill up; d'you—— [*He stumbles over the bath on the floor R. C. and instantly is in a temper.*] Blast it! Wot d'yer want to 'ave vat blinkin' fing abaht ve floor for?

MRS HENDERSON. I was wringing——

JOE. I might 'a' broke me bloomin' neck over it.

MRS HENDERSON. Well, you didn't.

JOE. Clever, ain't you? Leavin' fings. Can't you sit dahn, Bill, after those stairs—— ?

BILL. Vey are a bit. . . . [*Crosses and sits below table.*

JOE [*crosses and cuts a piece of bread at table, then sits and starts eating*]. Puh! You've got it 'ot enough in 'ere.

MRS HENDERSON. I've 'ad the window open. I 'ad to 'ave the fire, to dry by.

JOE [*angrily*]. Washin'?

MRS HENDERSON [*nervously*]. Yes, Joe.

EMMY [*appearing in door*]. Can I 'ave 'apenny to spend, Muvver?

MRS HENDERSON [*shocked at the idea*]. No! Wot next?

EMMY. Oh, Muvver, just 'apenny, cos——

MRS HENDERSON. You know perfeckly well as I——

JOE [*raising his voice above theirs in spite of the handicap of a mouthful of bread*]. Go on! Give 'er a 'apenny wen she arsts for it.

MRS HENDERSON [*expostulating*]. Joe, 'ow can I——?

JOE. Give 'er a 'apenny I say, when I tells you to. . . . And don't answer me back.

[MRS HENDERSON *with dull obedience obeys, taking from her pocket a purse.*

JOE [*less loudly*]. And send 'er out to get me a drop o' beer. [MRS HENDERSON *takes down a jug from dresser.*

EMMY. Nah, you know I can't go into a pub wiv baby, Farver.

JOE. Wot? W'y not?

EMMY. It's agin ve law.

BILL [*quietly, but with authority*]. Vat's right, Joe.

MRS HENDERSON [*in further corroboration*]. Yes, vey——

JOE [*turning on her*]. Ven go an' get it yourself.

MRS HENDERSON. Alright.

EMMY. Goo'-bye. [*Turns to go.*

MRS HENDERSON. You might fetch ve beer an ven come back for baby——

EMMY. I'm——

JOE [*loudly*]. I tol' *you* to fetch it, didn't I? Well ven, go an' do it. [EMMY *exits and clatters downstairs.*

MRS HENDERSON [*going on to landing and calling after*]. Emmy! [*More loudly*] Emmy!

EMMY [*pausing on the floor below*]. Wot?

MRS HENDERSON [*just outside door*]. Don't go running downstairs so fast wiv baby. You'll be catching 'is 'ead in ve bannisters again.

EMMY [*scornfully*]. Fusspot! [*Clatters on down.*

MRS HENDERSON [*returning to room*]. Vere you are, Joe! Wot d'you make me give 'er a 'apenny for?

JOE [*aggressively*]. 'Cause I chose . . . see? I suppose I can give me own kid a 'apenny wen she arsts for it, can't I? It ain't often I'm 'ome, and I likes to see people lookin' 'appy 'n' glad to see me—[*pointedly*]—not grizzlin'.

MRS HENDERSON. I ain't grizzlin'.

JOE [*loudly*]. Yus you are. An' don't answer me back—before Bill! I'm surprised at you. Wot will 'e fink of us?

BILL [*politely*]. Oh, vat's alright. I've been married mesself; I knows wot women are.

JOE. Vey wouldn't be so bad if vey didn't jaw.

BILL [*agreeing*]. Vat's it!

JOE. Did you ever see a couple o' women over a cup o' tea? Gawd's truff! Clack, clack, clack.

BILL [*nodding*]. Vat's it!

JOE. Clack, clack, clack . . . ve woman nex' door—or else runnin' dahn veir 'usbands.

BILL. Ah!

JOE [*turning on his wife again*]. Nah, wot about vat beer?

MRS HENDERSON [*who has been quietly making up the fire*]. I'm going, Joe. Gimme time to make the fire up.

JOE [*grunting scornfully*]. Make ve fire up.

MRS HENDERSON [*with more acerbity*]. You don't want to sleep in wet sheets to-night, I suppose.

JOE. I never see anythink like you! You've always got fings dryin' wen I come 'ome. Wot's up wiv you?

MRS HENDERSON. You wouldn't like to come 'ome to find ve place all dirty, would you, Joe?

JOE. Well ven, w'y couldn't you get 'em done early in ve week? You know puffeckly well as I'd be 'ome o' Friday night. An' 'ere you are a doin' of 'em ve very day I comes 'ome. Aggravator!

MRS HENDERSON. I 'ad a bit o' charing to do yesterday. I'll 'ave 'em all done an' out of ve way before your nex' night 'ome I—— [*She is taking down jug as she speaks.*]

JOE. You won't 'ave ve chance. I'm not goin' away no more.

MRS HENDERSON [*turning, jug in hand*]. Wot?

JOE. I ain't goin' away with ve barge no more.

MRS HENDERSON [*apprehensively*]. Got ve sack?

JOE [*insulted*]. Wot d'you mean—"Got ve sack"? Vey've put me on ve dredger; ten bob a week extra an' live at 'ome.

MRS HENDERSON. At 'ome?

JOE. Yus, at 'ome. . . . Wot's up wiv you?

MRS HENDERSON. You'll be 'ome all ve week ven——? Every week?

JOE [*sarcastically*]. D'you mind?

MRS HENDERSON. I'll—— [*Suddenly opens door and exits, closing it after her.*]

BILL. She don't seem very pleased.

JOE [*roughly tolerant*]. She's alright. Bit startled, vat's all. She'll 'ave to get used to it.

BILL [*after a pause, enviously*]. Bit o' luck, ain't it?

JOE [*unenthusiastically*]. It's alright.

BILL. Ten bob a week more.

JOE. Liz'll get that aht o' me—some of it—wen I'm 'ome all the week.

BILL [*awed*]. You won't go givin' 'er ve 'ole lot of it?

JOE. Ve 'ole ten bob? Wot do you take me for? Do you fink I'm goin' to slave me 'eart out on ve blinkin' dredger an' not 'ave a bit for mesself? Don't be silly. [*Changing subject*] Firsty?

BILL [*with some satisfaction*]. Not bad.

JOE. So'm I. Jolly 'ot in 'ere, ain't it?

BILL. I don't mind it.

JOE. It's not 'ealthy, you know. [*Rises and pulls chair out from table to enable himself to stoop and undo his boots.*] Vat's Liz all over! Goes aht charin' wile I'm away an' messes abaht ve place all ve bloomin' time wen I'm 'ome. Never goes aht, 'ardly, except to get me a drop o' beer. Aggravator!

[*There is a moment's pause while* JOE *removes a boot.*

BILL [*voicing his thoughts*]. You 'ave to work jolly 'ard on the dredger.

JOE [*unlacing the other boot*]. Yes.

BILL [*continuing*]. All ve time—wiv ve foreman watching you.

JOE. I know. [*Straightening his back, and speaking with becoming seriousness.*] I'm not so sure as I'm really betterin' mesself, you know, Bill. [*Pauses, thinking.*] Of course, it's ten bob more . . . but they gets it out of you in work.

BILL. I expecks vey'd put you back on one of ve ol' barges if you arst 'em to.

JOE [*sucking doubtfully on a tooth*]. Risky.

BILL. Risky? 'Ow?

JOE. Make 'em fink as you didn't like work.

BILL. Ah!

JOE [*disparagingly*]. Vey're like vat.

BILL. Vat's true.

JOE [*returning to his boot*]. She's takin' 'er time over vat beer.

BILL. Far to go for it? [*Rising and looking out of the window.*]

JOE. Just across ve road.

BILL. Don't see no sign of 'er. Wich pub?

JOE. Fird along . . . not countin' those two opposite.

BILL [*crossing room to a small photo of a group hanging on wall below door*]. Vis you?

JOE [*looking up*]. Wot? Oh vat. Yes—wiv Liz.

BILL. Taken wen you was married? Plenty of you, ain't vere?

JOE. Vat's all Liz's family.

BILL. None o' yours?

JOE [*grimly*]. I saw to vat.

BILL. Oo's vis? [*Appreciatively*] Bit of alright.

JOE. Vat? One of Liz's sisters or somethink; vey all turned up.

BILL. W'y didn't you marry 'er?

JOE. She wasn't respectable.

BILL. Was you married in church?

JOE. Yes. Liz would 'ave it. You know wot women are for a bit o' show.

BILL. It don't do to give way to 'em.

JOE. One 'as to at ve start. Liz said as 'ow she'd be married in church or not at all. . . .

BILL. You should a' said not at all ven.

JOE [*tolerantly*]. Oh, I dunno. . . .

BILL [*still at photo*]. Oo's vis? Ol' chap wiv a beard. . . .

JOE. Liz's farver . . . worked at a brewery. W'ere ve blinkin' Sam's vat beer?

BILL. She does take 'er time, don't she ?

JOE. I'd go after 'er only—— [*Divested of his boots he pads softly up to the door and opens it. He is about to step out on to landing when something catches his eye in the room opposite and he stops dead, staring across the landing more in curiosity than surprise.*] 'Ullo. . . . Wot . . . ?

BILL [*turning*]. Wot's up ?

JOE [*softly*]. Come 'ere.

BILL [*taking his tone from the other*]. Wot is it ? [*Moves softly up stage towards door.*]

JOE [*suddenly changing his mind and closing the door swiftly but silently*]. No . . . 'arf a mo'.

BILL [*stopping, surprised*]. Wot's up wiv you ?

JOE. Nuffin'. [*Turns to door, his hand upon the knob, but looks back suspiciously at* BILL *before opening it.*] It ain't nuffin', I say.

BILL. Alright.

JOE. Ven don't go lookin' over my shoulder.

BILL. I wasn't.

JOE [*pointing to the farthest chair : the one below the table*]. Go an' sit over vere.

BILL [*surprised but amiable*]. Alright.

[JOE *watches him to the chair, and then quietly opens door again and peers across landing. He holds the door a bare couple of feet open, and, as it opens down stage, nothing can be seen from the audience. After a moment of perfect silence he closes the door softly, ruffling his hair thoughtfully. An idea strikes him. He resumes his chair by the table and calls.*

JOE [*loudly*]. Liz !

BILL [*who has been watching his friend in amazement*]. Wot . . . ain't she gone for it, ven ?

JOE. She's in ve ovver room.

BILL. 'Iding ?

JOE. Shut up. [*Calls again.*] Liz.

[*While the name is still on his lips* MRS HENDERSON *opens the door and stands on the threshold, her hat on and the jug in her hand.*

MRS HENDERSON [*stopping just inside the door*]. I'm just goin' for it, Joe. I 'ad to stop an' put on me 'at. [*Turns to go.*]

JOE. Liz.

MRS HENDERSON [*turning obediently*]. Wot ?

JOE. 'Arf a mo'.

MRS HENDERSON [*obediently returning to C. of room*]. Wot ?

JOE [*awkwardly, as he forms a question in his mind*]. Liz . . . wot—— [*Suddenly remembering the presence of his friend*] 'Ere, Bill . . . oblige me by poppin' aht for vat beer . . . you don't mind ?

BILL [*rising, mystified*]. No.

JOE. I'd go mesself, only I've got me boots off. 'Ere. [*Hands over some money.*] Get a quart . . . no 'urry. . . .

BILL. Alright. [*Goes off in dull perplexity.*

MRS HENDERSON. I 'ope Bill don't mind. . . .

JOE [*ignoring her remark*]. Liz.

MRS HENDERSON. Wot ?

JOE. Wot was you adoin' of ?

MRS HENDERSON. Wot was I wot ?

JOE. Wot was you adoin' of ?

MRS HENDERSON. W'en ?

JOE. Just now. W'en I called you.

MRS HENDERSON. Putting me 'at on.

JOE. No, you wasn't. I opened ve door.

MRS HENDERSON. Ve door ? What for ?

JOE. To 'ave a look aht an' see wot 'ad become of you an' vat beer. An' I see you in vere kneelin' wiv your 'ed on ve bed. Wot's up wiv you ?

MRS HENDERSON [*guiltily*]. I was sayin' me prayers.

JOE. Wot ?

MRS HENDERSON. It don't take. . . .

JOE. You don't 'ave to say your prayers before fetchin' a drop o' beer, do you ?

MRS HENDERSON [*reproaching the irreverence*]. Joe !

JOE. Well, wot's up wiv you, ven ? [*No answer.*] Ain't you well ?

MRS HENDERSON. I'm alright.

JOE. You don't say vem every day, do you ?

MRS HENDERSON. No, nuffink like.

JOE. Ven wot . . .?

MRS HENDERSON. I felt I wanted to.

JOE. Felt you wanted to ? W'y ?

MRS HENDERSON. I felt—grateful-like—vat's all.

JOE. Felt wot ?

MRS HENDERSON. Grateful-like . . . you know. . . . [*Ashamed*] I sort of felt I wanted to—— [*Hesitates.*]

JOE. Well ?

MRS HENDERSON [*more and more ashamed*]. To sort o' fank Gawd—it come over me. . . .

JOE. Fank Gawd ? Wot for ?

MRS HENDERSON. Well, because . . . you . . . ain't goin' away no more.

[JOE *is paralysed with amazement and sits staring at her, unable to speak. At last—awed—he clears his throat.*

JOE. You. . . . [*Inadequately*] You're glad, ven ?

MRS HENDERSON. It's—it's a bit o' company for me——

JOE. Wot ? I am ? Get aht ! [*Rises and looks out of window, thinking.*] You don't like me goin' away, ven ?

MRS HENDERSON. Well, I missed you sometimes.

JOE [*under his breath*]. 'Struth !

MRS HENDERSON. You mean you don't miss me ?

JOE. I donno. I never noticed.

MRS HENDERSON. Oh, but you always 'ad something to occupy your mind.

JOE. Yes. [*With a fresh thought*] Liz.

MRS HENDERSON. Wot ?

JOE. You . . . I mean . . . it ain't just a 'abit wiv you ?

MRS HENDERSON. Wot ?

JOE. Fankin' Gawd for fings. You ain't always adoin' of it ?

MRS HENDERSON. No. I just come over——

JOE. D'you believe in Gawd ?

MRS HENDERSON. I donno. . . . Yes.

JOE [*in just the same tone—he has been looking out of the window as he spoke*]. 'Ere comes ol' Bill wiv ve beer.

MRS HENDERSON [*relieved*]. I'll put aht ve glasses.

[*She brings down glasses from the dresser to table. He takes her by the arm and turns her to him.*

JOE. You're quite sure it ain't just a 'abit ? You're really glad as I'm goin' to be 'ome . . . all ve time ? Spit your oaf ?

MRS HENDERSON. Of course I'm glad, Joe. Really glad——

[BILL *enters with the beer.*

BILL [*engrossed in his purchase*]. I spilt a bit comin' up ve stairs. Vey're vat dark !

JOE. Vat's alright.

BILL [*stopping and looking at them suspiciously*]. Anything up ?

JOE. No.

[BILL *returns to his usual chair below the table.* MRS HENDERSON *has taken the beer from him, and takes it to* JOE.

JOE [*slowly pouring out the beer and passing it to* BILL]. D'you believe in Gawd, Bill ?

BILL [*vaguely surprised*]. Wot? I donno. Yes, I suppose so. W'y?

JOE. Nuffin'. After all, it don't signify. [*Pushing the jug across*] 'Ere, you pour it out. I don't want none.

BILL. Wot?

JOE. I feels a bit—— 'Ere, 'ave some bread 'n' cheese.

BILL. Fanks.

JOE [*after wrestling with his thoughts*]. Liz.

MRS HENDERSON. Wot?

JOE [*laboriously*]. I ain't 'ome—*for ever*—even nah. We—I shall 'ave to leave you agin—some day. Wot about vat? You—— [*Turns almost with a groan to the table.*] Gawd's truth! Wot are we 'ere for?

BILL [*eating*]. I donno.

[EMMY *clatters in at the door, carrying the baby, and bubbling over with amazing news.*

EMMY. Mummy, Tommy's seen a black'n'white horse, 'n' an ol' man in a carriage dressed up like a soldier, 'n' a monkey in Jute Street, 'n'——

[*The curtain descends, cutting short her volubility; but not before* JOE—*his face clearing—has held out his arms for his baby.*

HOW THE WEATHER IS MADE

A LITTLE FANTASY

By Harold Brighouse

CHARACTERS

The Clerk of the Weather

Miss Smith	May
Sol	June
Rain	July
Frost	August
January	September
February	October
March	November
April	December

It was originally intended to print "The Price of Coal"—about which Professor Allardyce Nicoll speaks with approbation in *British Drama*[1]—as a representative specimen of Mr Brighouse's work. With the object, however, of including an example of the modern pastoral play "How the Weather is Made" has been substituted.

While this play presents no difficulties for indoor performance it is one of several in *Open-Air Plays* and *Plays for the Meadow and Plays for the Lawn* (both volumes published by Messrs Samuel French) written specifically for outdoor performance. Technically, the outdoor play has its own little problems. As there can be no curtain there can be no climacteric 'curtains,' no scenery beyond Nature's own, and a minimum of 'properties'—such, for example, as a garden-seat—should be employed. It is almost the problem of the circus: the performers are not cut off, glamorously, from the audience by a proscenium arch and a raised stage; and the sense of romance must be evoked by costume. The best-known of these outdoor plays by Mr Brighouse are "The Prince who was a Piper" and "Maypole Morning" in *Plays for the Meadow*; but the following example, and "The Laughing Mind" in the new volume, *Open-Air Plays*, should speedily establish themselves.

[1] Harrap, 12*s*. 6*d*.

HOW THE WEATHER IS MADE[1]

The scene is an open space, carpeted by grass, with more than two entrances to it if you feel extravagant, but at any rate one entrance to the R. and another to the L.

A preoccupied gentleman, formally dressed in morning coat and silk hat, walks into the space. A young lady, in summer clothes, but carrying an umbrella and a Burberry, enters in pursuit of him. Her name is everybody's name, but for convenience we may call her MISS SMITH.

MISS SMITH. Excuse me! Excuse me, sir.

THE GENTLEMAN [*without turning*]. Busy, busy!

MISS SMITH. But I must speak to you. It's most urgent.

THE GENTLEMAN [*now turning*]. Have you filled in a form?

MISS SMITH. No. I didn't know that was necessary.

[*So the* GENTLEMAN *continues his walk.*

Oh, I won't be bound by red tape. I will speak to you. You are the Clerk of the Weather, aren't you?

THE CLERK. Am I to have no privacy anywhere?

MISS SMITH. But you are a public servant and I'm the public. I want to know——

THE CLERK [*turning, raising his hat*]. Madam, bulletins are issued from Room 6058 double *x q*. If you will kindly apply to the officer in charge——

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

MISS SMITH. But you are in charge of the officer. You are the brains behind the bulletins. Oh, it's useless to deny it. You have the brows of a thinker, the air of a man who is a leader of men, the bearing of a sage.

THE CLERK. Naturally. I was at Oxford.

MISS SMITH. Then you can tell me everything.

THE CLERK. Undoubtedly I can.

MISS SMITH. It's about the weather.

THE CLERK. Oh, there I must beg to be excused. Professional etiquette. I'm sure you will understand me when I say that mysteries should be mysterious.

MISS SMITH. Perhaps I understand you very well.

THE CLERK. Indeed ?

MISS SMITH. If you decline to tell me what's wrong with the weather, you lay yourself open to a grave suspicion. You nourish the belief which already exists in the public mind, that the Clerk of the Weather knows no more about it than anybody else.

THE CLERK. Mob-opinion is very irreverent nowadays. But I'm sure nobody so young and beautiful as you could possibly subscribe to such a sentiment.

MISS SMITH. I'm exceedingly tired of carrying an umbrella in June.

THE CLERK. I sympathize, but you don't expect me to control the months, do you ?

MISS SMITH. Why not ?

THE CLERK. For a reason so obvious that I hate to mention it. It would hint at an ignorance in you which I am sure does not exist.

MISS SMITH. Of course, you're telling me nothing. You're a well-trained official. Officials always tell nothing to conceal the fact that they have nothing to tell.

THE CLERK. But that is almost—I only say " almost "—verging upon rudeness.

MISS SMITH. Truth has no manners, Mr Clerk.

THE CLERK. You can't be aware what you said. You have attributed ignorance to Government officials!

MISS SMITH. A crime, I suppose?

[*And if you think* MISS SMITH'S *modern flippancy amounts to Bolshevism, why, aren't we all?*

THE CLERK. In a better age than this you would have been beheaded. As it is, madam, in this chaotic era of humanitarian sentimentality when people can forget the respect due to Government officials and can escape the discipline of decapitation, as it is, madam, I incline to scarify your unbelief myself. I have a mind to draw aside the awful veil and to compel you with your own eyes to witness the weather in the making.

MISS SMITH. You really do know? [*She begins to think it possible.*]

THE CLERK. Madam, the weather is a very old institution and a very conservative one. The weather does not change.

MISS SMITH. You know, even as the formal pronouncement of a Government official, that strikes me as a corking whopper.

THE CLERK. I should have put it that the weather is unchanging in its habit of changing.

MISS SMITH. Thank you. Most informing. And is that what you meant by drawing aside the veil? I might have known you meant nothing.

THE CLERK. I did not mean nothing. If I decide to draw the veil I shall be revealing to you the causes of the weather.

MISS SMITH. That's what I want. Let's get at the cause and there's hope of a cure.

THE CLERK. There is no hope.

[*His gloom is tragic: it is the profound sadness of the sage.*

MISS SMITH. I'm afraid you're a pessimist. Modern science——

THE CLERK. Science? Science is a toy, a plaything of the animalcule, man. If you seriously think that science is a big thing, let me advise you, while yet there is time, to withdraw from beholding the mystery of the weather.

MISS SMITH. You're trying to frighten me.

THE CLERK. Can you look at the sun?

MISS SMITH. Only for a moment, the same as every one else.

THE CLERK. In the Glade of the Weather, it may be necessary to look at the sun for half an hour.

MISS SMITH. Can *you* stand it?

THE CLERK. It is part of my official duty to stand it.

MISS SMITH. Then I'm perfectly sure it's safe.

THE CLERK. Very well, madam, I defy the Official Secrets Act and I introduce you, at your own risk, to the inner mystery of the weather. Come with me, come, behold, and learn for yourself how hopeless is the hope that man can bend the weather to his will.

[*With outspread arms he makes the gesture of drawing a curtain and bows* MISS SMITH *into the space behind.*

You may watch, and you may sit down, but you may not speak.

MISS SMITH. As there are no seats, I——

[*Do you know, she is quite resentful. Yet many people stand for hours in order to see a football match.*

THE CLERK. As there are no seats, you may lie down. Permit me.

[*He takes her mackintosh and spreads it as a rug to one side.* MISS SMITH *reclines on the mackintosh: and dwindles for a while into inconspicuousness. Meanwhile* SOL *has entered, a very splendid person in flame-colour, with a hat suggesting a crown. He looks bored, and he too rests on the grass.* SOL

yawns audibly, which causes the CLERK *to turn from* MISS SMITH *and to run to* SOL, *bowing.*

THE CLERK. Good morning. I hope you're merely lying down to rest. Your health is——

SOL. My health is excellent. But I am bored.

THE CLERK. Oh, my dear Sol, no! I implore you! The World suffers alarmingly when you are bored.

SOL. The World does not count for much in a solar system, my friend. [*Rises, yawning and stretching.*] And I *am* bored.

THE CLERK. It is such a disaster to the World.

SOL. Your parochial troubles don't agitate me. It's June. That month puts a terrible strain on my constancy.

THE CLERK. Only thirty days, your Majesty. One of the shorter months.

SOL. I know, but they begin at 3 A.M. and go on till 9 P.M. How would you like a working day of eighteen hours? That's what the jade expects of me.

THE CLERK. I don't find in my reports that she often sees as much of you as that.

SOL. Probably not. June has a pretty face, but I ask you, can any sun make love to the same face for eighteen hours a day?

[JUNE *enters: decked with roses. Her face is sunburnt. Hatlessness is fatal to shell-pink.*

JUNE [*running towards* SOL]. My lover and my king!

SOL. Good morning. You're a little late to-day.

JUNE. A jealous mist parted us.

SOL. Oh, I'm not reproaching you. I'm sure if you care to disobey the calendar, it's no business of mine.

JUNE. I hate the calendar. The calendar makes a short month of me and gives me fewer days with you than some of my sisters have.

SOL. But yours are longer days.

JUNE. That is because you love me best of all the months.

SOL. I have to love you longest.

JUNE. Have to? You speak as if you found it disagreeable.

SOL. I wouldn't say positively disagreeable. A trifle monotonous, perhaps.

JUNE. Indeed? Then why did you chase Rain away yesterday?

SOL. Did I? A moment of carelessness. Mere force of habit.

JUNE. Oh!

SOL. Well, my dear, after I've been staring at you for eighteen hours——

THE CLERK. Or thereabouts.

SOL. —or thereabouts. More or less eighteen hours, I'm bound to say your face becomes a little obvious. I don't blame you. Any face would.

JUNE. Perhaps you prefer January?

SOL. It's possible, but like a woman, my dear, you are running to extremes. I have never seen January's face. January is month-in-a-mist. Always she wears a veil.

JUNE. Then you can be perfectly certain it's because she has something to hide.

[*Enter* JANUARY, *who wears a long veil.*

JANUARY. I beg your pardon!

THE CLERK [*interposing in the greatest alarm*]. January, I beg you for the sake of every growing thing on Earth! It is summer. Consider the lilies of the field.

JANUARY. What do we care for that Earth of yours?

SOL. This little man is always worrying about the Earth. Stand aside, Clerk, and let me—— [*Pushing the* CLERK *aside and approaching* JANUARY.]

JANUARY. Oh, you are nearer to me than ever you have been before! [*Slowly she raises her veil: her face is very pale.*] My mists are melting in the fire of your eyes.

JUNE. I hope it doesn't make you feel clammy.

[*But she means, we fear, the opposite of what she says.*

JANUARY [*finishing the raising of her veil and standing at full height*]. I feel the Sun. Sol, King! [*She bows.*

SOL [*raising her*]. You please me, January.

JUNE. With that pale face? I'm sure she's anæmic.

SOL. And you are brown.

JUNE. How can I help being burnt when you glare at me all day?

SOL. My dear June, you shall have nothing to reproach me with in the future.

THE CLERK. I must protest. If you desert June——

SOL. Something will happen to your precious Earth, I suppose?

THE CLERK. Incalculable calamity will happen.

SOL. How very unfortunate for you that I find January more attractive every moment.

THE CLERK. In the *Book of Weather* it is writ that

> "If the grass grow in Janiveer
> It grows the worse for all the year."

SOL. Indeed? And am I a farmer?

THE CLERK. You are everything! [*He bows deeply to show that a clerk can be a courtier.*]

SOL. But not everything all at once. Just now, little man, I am a lover. Come, my January! [*Puts arm round her waist.*]

JANUARY [*sighing*]. Oh! [*A very melting lady, which is not surprising when you consider who she is and who he is.*]

JUNE [*jealously*]. Am I to be scorned for the sake of a cold, palefaced month who cannot put a flower on anything except the gorse?

SOL. Can't she? If I will it she shall wear white hawthorn

in her hair and golden corn shall ripen where she sets her feet.

THE CLERK. Oh, confusion! Corn and hawthorn blossom! Your Majesty——

SOL. I *am* your Majesty.

THE CLERK. If I could urge consideration on you! Think of the instability of thrones in modern life. Even a king must be orderly or he jeopardizes his throne.

JANUARY. What does he mean?

SOL. I can only imagine, my dear, that he is talking about that quaint little planet, the Earth. [*He begins to take* JANUARY *off.*]

JUNE. Never mind him. But it seems to me that I—that I shall do very well without you.

[*That refers to* KING FROST, *who, as* SOL *goes, naturally with his back turned, enters L., keeping step with* SOL. FROST *is in glittering white.*

SOL [*turning, and as he turns* FROST *shrinks back*]. Oh? Oh, it's that craven fellow who never looked me in the eyes in his life for more than a fraction of time.

[*From the same side as* FROST, *enter* DECEMBER, *who appears to be dressed wholly in veils.*

DECEMBER [*holding up her arm, from which veiling trails, to protect* FROST]. I offer you my mists to shield you from his fire.

FROST. Thank you, December. I'm touched by your constancy, but I rather wish you hadn't chosen to follow me just now.

DECEMBER. Is it nothing to you that I let Sol dry my mists for you? I suffer and you do not care.

JUNE. Personally, I don't know why you're here at all, December. If everybody had their rights, this is my ground.

SOL. Oh, you can keep your mists, December. [*Turns*

away with JANUARY.] It isn't worth the trouble of dissolving Frost. I can see that those ladies are going to give him a sufficiently uncomfortable time. [*Takes* JANUARY *off.*

DECEMBER [*to* JUNE]. I came because he [*that is*, FROST] came.

FROST. I'm certainly very fond of you, December. But be reasonable. Do remember how very rarely I have an opportunity to see June.

DECEMBER. Why should you ever have the opportunity ?

JUNE. Because I want to be made pale and romantic, and Frost can do that to my burnt-up face. You winter months, you dark ladies of the mists and the long nights, you have all the mystery and it isn't fair. Why must I never veil my face except sometimes in the early morning when nobody is awake to know that I, too, have my mystery ? I want King Frost to touch my lips with his and——

DECEMBER. I consider you a very brazen month. I certainly shall not allow Frost to come near you.

FROST. My dear December, this is jealousy. What possible harm can it do if I oblige June by kissing her ?

THE CLERK. In the World it——

JUNE [*pushing him away*]. We've heard quite enough about the World. If you try to interfere again I shall ask Frost to bite your nose. Even December will not object to that.

DECEMBER. Oh, no. I never interfere with Frost's sporting recreations. [*The* CLERK *retreats again, in great alarm.*

FROST. As a matter of fact, my dear December, you know very little of what I do on three hundred and thirty-four days of the year.

DECEMBER. I shut my eyes to you and January, but I know more than you think. I know you go riding on the winds of March and how you turn the rain of April into hail. And as for May——

FROST [*in alarm*]. You've not been talking to May ?

DECEMBER. I got it out of her, you wretch. But May is past and June is present, and let me tell you that June is no month for you.

JUNE. Oh ! Who are you to make the laws for Frost ? Who are you to say whose month I am ?

FROST. Really, my dear December, love you as I do at the fitting time, it is not you who keep me and June apart. It's Sol.

JUNE. And Sol is not here now, Frost.

FROST [*taking her hand and about to embrace her*]. I think we understand each other very well, my dear.

[*But he does not quite embrace, still less kiss,* JUNE, *because* SOL *is not the only adversary of* FROST, *and just now a voice is heard singing and a jolly fellow called* RAIN *enters with* FEBRUARY *on one arm and* AUGUST *on the other.*

JUNE. Frost, what ails you ?

FROST. I feel a weakness. I——

[RAIN *is here conceived as an impish creature of whims and showers rather than as a determined blackness : a Jack Point sort of a fellow, in Jack Point sort of costume suitably shaded to grey.* AUGUST *is decked with sunflowers ;* FEBRUARY *has snowdrops.* RAIN'S *snatch of song is "Begone, dull care."*

JUNE [*stamping her foot*]. Oh, you trespass ! You trespass on my very ground.

[*She means the months trespass, but if two ladies are on a gentleman's arm it is difficult to indicate that it is decidedly they, and decidedly not he, who are intruding.*

RAIN. I ask nobody where I fall.

JUNE. You, dear Rain, dear washer of my face, I do not

speak to you, but—— [*Looks angrily at* FEBRUARY *and* AUGUST.]

RAIN. Only my playmates, June. My merry month of August, my naughty month, my laughing rainbow of a month, you wouldn't part me from my playmate August? And Februeer, my faithful fill-dyke Februeer, why, if February's on my arm, on whose arm should she be but mine?

FROST [*now at a distance from* RAIN]. And I am all alone, June.

DECEMBER [*going to him*]. You needn't be.

FROST. But June has asked a favour of me. June has a craving to be pale of face, to be mysterious and interesting, and by the magic of my lips I can bleach the colour which too much companionship of Sol has put upon her cheeks.

[*So* DECEMBER *stands off from* FROST. *At the moment she hates him thoroughly.*

FEBRUARY. Oh, would that I could have June's place in the Sun's regard! I do hate to be called fill-dyke.

RAIN. That is hardly polite to me, February, my dear. I'm a good friend to every month there is, but you're the last month to complain of my inconstancy.

FEBRUARY. It's your constancy I complain of. When I see the other months with their flowers and their fruit I could weep.

AUGUST. You are always weeping. You have no discretion. Now, I watch that funny little planet they call Earth. It's a plaything of mine.

RAIN. And of mine.

AUGUST. Yes, you and I together, Rain, we have made some pretty mischief with the Earth's holiday season.

FEBRUARY. I don't care. I want roses. I'm the littlest month, and I want roses.

JUNE [*giving her some roses*]. Don't cry or you'll spoil them.

THE CLERK. Roses for February! I absolutely must protest. Ladies, you all know as well as I do that:

"All the months of the year
Curse a fair Februeer."

[*The* CLERK *watches the effect of this, then sits by* MISS SMITH.

RAIN. That is perfectly true. Give those roses back to June, my dear.

FEBRUARY. Oh, everybody bullies me because I'm short.

[*She returns the roses.*

RAIN. That's a good little month.

FEBRUARY. Little! Little! I won't be treated like a child.

FROST. I beg your pardon, Rain, but couldn't you and your particular friends carry on your arguments elsewhere?

[*He stands L., well apart from* RAIN.

RAIN. I feel quite at home. I'm at home everywhere.

FROST. Then anywhere will do. If you can't take a hint, let me tell you that June and I have business of a private nature.

RAIN. I noticed that Sol wasn't here.

JUNE. And I don't see the necessity for you to take his place.

RAIN. I very frequently displace him.

FROST. At the moment, strictly at the moment, you are unwelcome here.

JUNE. Yes.

RAIN. I hope I am a gentleman, June. If I could believe that you prefer the harsh embraces of Frost to my soft caresses, I should immediately withdraw, but I never believe the incredible. It's a principle of mine.

JUNE. Why is it incredible that I want to be kissed by Frost?

DECEMBER. It is not incredible, Rain. Shall I tell you why she wants that kiss ?

RAIN. Midsummer-madness, I presume.

DECEMBER. No, cunning, her amorous cunning, her——

JUNE. Oh! Is there no honour amongst months ? Will you betray my secret ?

DECEMBER. Will you cease trying to steal Frost from me ?

JUNE. I say that Frost does not belong to you.

FROST. I don't, and December knows it, too. She was telling me only to-day.

DECEMBER. Then listen, Rain. She wants Frost only that his touch of ice may make her sweeter for the Sun. It is Sol she loves, not you. It is for Sol she wishes to rise pale and languishing from the embrace of Frost.

RAIN [*looking at* FROST]. Is this true ?

FROST. I don't mind if it is. I can't pretend that I'm at my full strength just now, but I think I might be allowed to kiss June without all this organized opposition.

RAIN. Don't you understand that I came here to kiss her myself ? And I *don't* want her pale and languishing after you have tried to make an ice-month of her. Besides, she can't be leafy if you kiss her and she can't be leafy unless I kiss her.

JUNE. Why must I be leafy at all?

RAIN. It's your duty to be leafy. I like cushions when I fall.

FROST. Then I'll cheat you of your cushions early. You, there ! October, November !

[OCTOBER *and* NOVEMBER *enter L., the one with yew, the other with berries.*

I have my months, Rain.

RAIN. My dear fellow, every month is a month of mine.

FROST. I challenge you on that. [*To* OCTOBER *and* NOVEMBER] Bring me September here. [*They go.*

RAIN. You claim September! Absurd.

FROST. In the absence of Sol I claim every month that is.

DECEMBER [*warning him, because really she loves* FROST]. Sol has not gone far away, Frost. He will return.

[*Enter* SEPTEMBER, *led by* OCTOBER *and* NOVEMBER.

FROST [*waving* DECEMBER *away and speaking to* SEPTEMBER]. When your time comes to stand upon this ground, September, I shall be here. The leaves are to fall early, the harvest to be ruined, and you yourself to be, for all the thirty days of you, my slave.

[RAIN *and these three months are to the L.*

SEPTEMBER. Sol will protect me.

FROST. Sol has abdicated. Sol's lost his liking for the nut-brown months and fondles January. I! I am lord of the summer now.

RAIN. I hope you don't take this braggart seriously, September?

SEPTEMBER. I know you can wash him away from me.

FROST [*to* RAIN]. And will that do your leafy cushions any good when September is on the ground? The more you fall, the more you'll wash the leaves from the branches and the more you'll rot the crops. And later, with October's aid, I'll dry you up and freeze you.

RAIN. Not with October. It's too early, isn't it, sweetheart? [*Going to her.*]

OCTOBER [*tossing her head*]. You're everybody's lover, Rain. And Sol is very languid with me. I think if Frost would promise to be strong, that he and I——

FROST. It is the will which makes us strong, October. You and I both willing, girl, and what a month I'd make of you! [*Looks at* SEPTEMBER.] And of you, September.

SEPTEMBER [*coyly*]. You might. I don't know you very well, of course, but you *are* handsome.

FROST [*by her*]. And handsome is as handsome loves, my pretty.

RAIN. This is growing serious. You, there! July!

[JULY, *decked with lupin, enters from R.*

FROST. The sun-month to your aid! You must feel in a desperate case, Rain.

RAIN. July!

JULY. Oh, I am cold. Keep him away. [*Shrinking from* FROST.]

RAIN. You're safe with me.

FROST. The one month who is safe and she not always.

[*Makes a feint towards her.*

JULY. Oh! I want the Sun. [*Hiding from* FROST *behind* RAIN.]

JUNE. Pampered weakling!

[*Our splendid flaming* JUNE!

JULY. I hope Frost is nothing to you, June?

JUNE. Baby! A touch of Frost is stimulating to the strong. [*The Amazon!*

DECEMBER. You know he'll turn you pale. You want to be turned pale.

FROST. My dear December, I'd been forgetting you. Your place is over here, with me.

DECEMBER. But I——

FROST. Come. [*She crosses to L.*] Rain and I are marshalling our months. He claimed a hold on every one of you. [*Looking proudly at his squad*] We seem so far to be equal, Rain.

NOVEMBER. I——

FROST. Well?

NOVEMBER. I like Rain. I don't care who knows it.

RAIN. Is there by any chance a mutiny in your army, Frost?

FROST [*to* NOVEMBER, *seizing her roughly*]. You shall have

as much or as little of Rain as I allow. I am your master, November.

NOVEMBER [*cowed*]. Yes.

FROST [*swaggering*]. That ends that mutiny. Now, Rain, have you any hope that May is a month of yours?

RAIN. You claim May! You grow audacious.

FROST. Oh, but May and I have met by moonlight, and in the misty dawn we've had those stolen hours which are the sweetest of the sweet.

THE CLERK. That explains the advice in the *Book of the Weather*:

"Ne'er cast a clout
Till May is out."

[*Only this time, he doesn't interfere: he merely speaks to* MISS SMITH.

RAIN [*looks off R. and calls*]. May! May!

[*And* MAY, *the faithless, does not come to his calling.* RAIN *has the feeling of an awkward pause and you in the audience begin to think there's a stage wait.*

FROST [*scoffing*]. Try April if you want anything to happen.

RAIN. But May is later than April.

FROST. Ah! The later the sweeter. Now let me try. May! May!

[*And at his call* MAY *comes, decked with hawthorn, and* MAY *is, perhaps, a bit of a minx.*

MAY. My lover of the dawn!

[*She comes from the R., and* RAIN *intercepts her as she goes L.*

RAIN. You're not going to put a few odd half-hours in front of all the time you've spent with me!

MAY. Oh, but it seemed so wicked, so deliciously wicked, to kiss King Frost while Sol was getting up!

RAIN. But I'm an early riser myself. In fact, I often stay out all night.

MAY. I know. I was so used to you.

RAIN. Are you telling me I'm commonplace?

MAY. Not when you make the rainbows.

RAIN. I can only do that when Sol is there.

MAY. Yes, Rain. I either like two lovers at once or else one [*looks at* FROST] who is not commonplace. [*So she crosses to* FROST.]

RAIN. I! I a commonplace! [*His distress is pitiable.*]

FROST. And five months are mine, Rain. [*He embraces* MAY *possessively.*]

RAIN [*goes R. and says softly*]. April, my April!

FROST [*to his months*]. Not daring to command, the fellow *begs* her to appear.

[*Enter* APRIL *R., decked with celandine.*

APRIL. You called, my king.

[*She kneels to* RAIN, *who looks proudly at* FROST.

FROST. You may have your little triumph.

MAY. Slavish, I call her.

FROST. And as to March, my fellow, as to March?

RAIN. I trust the lusty maid. March! March!

[*Enter* MARCH *R., decked with daffodils.*

FROST. I also am here, March.

AUGUST. Whom do you favour, March? Sol is away, and which in his absence is your choice between these two?

[MARCH *steps towards* FROST.

FROST. Ah!

MARCH [*hesitating C.*] But that is when I come in like a lion.

FROST. Be lion-hearted to the end.

MARCH [*a step towards* RAIN]. But I go out like a lamb.

FEBRUARY. What are you like on the odd day?

MARCH. The odd day?

FEBRUARY. Yes.

"Thirty days have September, April, June and November,
All the rest have thirty-one——"

and the only consolation of my blighted life is that I have more of that verse than anyone else. You have thirty-one days, March, and I ask you, are you a lion or a lamb on the odd day?

FROST. Yes: which are you then?

MARCH. I'm blown about too much to know.

RAIN. But I am in the wind.

FROST. And I.

MARCH. Yes. And very bracing you are, Frost. I think if I could choose about the odd day that I should choose you.

FROST. Oh! [*Comes over and takes her L.*] A lusty maid, he called you, and you knew who gave you strength. Six months, Rain. Six of the twelve are mine and January——

RAIN. Oh, January!

FROST. A month of mine if ever month was mine.

DECEMBER. After me, I think, Frost.

FROST. Or are you eleven after her?

RAIN. Sol must have taken January very far. I don't feel my usual self at all. I'm feeling sleety.

FROST. I gain upon you every minute.

RAIN. I begin to think that it's a case for compromise. [*Scratches head.*] What can I do to bring Sol back? [*He turns to his months.*]

JUNE [*bitterly*]. Do nothing, Rain, do nothing and in a very little while your power to keep me prisoner from Frost will go.

RAIN. Well, if that isn't just like a war! I'd forgotten what the war was about. You wanted to be kissed by Frost, didn't you?

FEBRUARY. For love of Sol, Rain. Don't forget that.

RAIN. I know, my dear, but I shall get an exceedingly bad chill if this contention is prolonged. Besides, if Sol is going to fall in love with June again as soon as Frost has kissed the warmth from her cheeks, Frost's powers will be cut away. Oh, I don't think it's a surrender on my part to let her kiss him. I don't even call it a compromise. I call it a *ruse de guerre*, and I put it in French so that only months of superior education will understand how clever I'm being. Frost certainly won't understand. He's a rude fellow.

MARCH. Excuse me. Not rude. Robust.

RAIN. I accept the amendment. I'll accept any amendment of this chill. I shall stiffen into hail in a minute. Frost, my dear fellow, do I remember your mentioning a wish to kiss June ?

FROST. Is there any other issue between us at the moment?

RAIN. Dear me ! I'd forgotten you were making a point of it. Granted, of course, my dear Frost. A trifle. Don't thank me.

FROST. I thank my Zero for it.

RAIN. You may be right. If Zero is your totem, by all means thank him, but for water's sake do hurry. I've ramrods in every limb.

JUNE. Frost ! My lover at last !

[FROST *comes towards her, and the nearer he comes the stiffer* RAIN *appears.* FROST *and* JUNE *meet C. and they go off together L.*

THE CLERK. Frost and June ! Oh, suffering Earth !

[*Nobody takes any notice of him except* MISS SMITH.

DECEMBER [*watching* FROST *go*]. And my feelings are nothing to anybody. That brazen hussy !

MAY. If it comes to that, what about you ? You meet Frost at midday yourself. I am at least discreet.

RAIN. Oh ! [*Stretching his stiff limbs*] I creak, but suppleness returns to me. That's better. [*So much better*

that he casts a master's eye on the months who were FROST'S *a minute ago and he shakes a fist under* MAY'S *nose.*] May, you're a minx!

MAY [*curtsying impudently*]. Thank you, sir. And may Sol defend me from too much of you.

THE CLERK. Oh, yes! Yes, indeed. At last that is a sentiment I can applaud.

RAIN. And as for you, September——

SEPTEMBER. Be careful what you say to me, Rain.

RAIN. I shall say that I consider it exceedingly forward in you to admire Frost.

SEPTEMBER. Very well, if you want cushions to fall on, Frost and I will see to it that the leaves fall early and——

RAIN. Then I shall only fall on the rhododendrons. But I don't believe a word of it. There isn't a month amongst you could get on without me, and you have me when my fancy turns upon you.

[*And so, rather vainglorioously it might be thought for an element in defeat, he beckons the* MONTHS *around him, gets as many as he can on each arm and sings.*

[*Singing "Begone, dull care," with slight variation.*

"Begone, Jack Frost,
I prithee begone from me.
Begone, hard Ice,
You and I shall never agree.
Long time hast thou been tarrying here
And fain thou would'st me kill,
But i' faith, bleak Frost,
Thou never shalt have thy will.

Too much hoar Frost
Will make the Earth turn grey,

And too much cold
Will turn an old man to clay.
My months shall dance and I will sing,
So merrily pass the day,
For I hold it one of the wisest things
To drive Jack Frost away."

[FROST *and* JUNE *re-enter L., and such is the magic of his kiss that, indeed, she is no longer sunburnt.*

JUNE [*dropping to ground*]. Oh, I faint, I swoon!

DECEMBER. I knew it! I knew she could never stand the icy hug of Frost.

JUNE. I knew it too.

DECEMBER. You bragged of being stimulated, you spoiled darling of the Sun.

JUNE. That was to lure Frost to me. I wanted to be pale for Sol who wearied of my flaming face. But, oh, the ordeal by Frost!

FROST. That's a nice way to speak of a lover. She's been kissing me as if I were a medicine. I shan't often make love to June. Oh!

[*This "Oh!" of pain is caused by the appearance, R., of* SOL *and* JANUARY. *And now it is* JANUARY *who is sunburnt and less veiled about the body than she was.*

[*Backing as* SOL *approaches.*] And tan! Tan on the face of January!

JANUARY [*coming towards him*]. Frost!

FROST. But you are sunburnt. You are warm from Sol's embraces. [*He backs from her.*

JANUARY. Frost! I need you. Put back my veils about me.

DECEMBER. If you feel immodest, my dear, you have only yourself to blame.

FROST. At the same time, December, it is pleasant to be told that one is needed. I shall forgive her the immodesty

of a face which is not only blatantly brown, but shamelessly unveiled.

JANUARY [*going to him*]. My lord!

FROST. There, child, there!

[*He veils her face. They are carefully remote from* SOL.

SOL [*at last seeing* JUNE, *who, poor lady, has been making appealing gestures to him from the ground*]. June? That's never June!

JUNE. It is.

SOL. Pale of face and drooping? That isn't like my gorgeous June.

JUNE. You didn't want me to be like your gorgeous June. You said you wanted me pale.

SOL. Did I say that? What a king I am! My mere expression of a whim to have you pale turns you pale.

[*The other* MONTHS *cough behind their hands.* What is this epidemic? I have always considered myself fatal to coughs.

JULY. Oh, you are, Majesty, undoubtedly.

SOL [*glaring at the now self-conscious* MONTHS]. I am glad to be reassured.

FROST [*feeling at a safe distance*]. Kings are always reassured.

SOL. I shall turn my face to you.

FROST. Mercy, King!

JUNE. Your arms, Sol! I am fainting for your arms.

SOL. Just one moment, June. I have to glare at Frost. [*He does, and* FROST *shrinks from him and slinks off L.*] That settles him!

JUNE. Raise me to the glowing splendour of your kingly eyes.

SOL [*handing her up*]. You are a faithful creature, June.

JUNE [*romantically*]. To bask in your light, again.

SOL. I will shine on you for ever. [RAIN *laughs and* SOL *looks at him.*] Or nearly for ever. [*Taking her off R., and saying as they go:*] That fellow who laughed. Yes, he's the Court barber, you know, and one allows these liberties. I have him round to make rainbows to comb your hair.

JUNE. You master of all!

SOL. That is as true as the Moon, my dear.

[*Exeunt* SOL *and* JUNE.

RAIN [*sings. Air, "The Vicar of Bray"—because that vicar, also, was various in his loves and constant to his office.* RAIN *sings the first four lines as if addressing* SOL].

"Oh, what about November days
When Earth is full of joy, sire?
Say, is it just retiring ways
Or fear to damp your sun-fire?
And though in spring-time lad and lass
Speed duly forth to chatter
The sunshine rarely comes to pass
But I'm all pit, pit, patter!"

CHORUS.

"And this is the law that I'll (he'll) declare
Until my (his) dying day, sir,
That howsoever Sol may glare
I follow (he follows) him with my (his) spray, sir."

RAIN. "The time I love the most of all
Is England's months of cricket,
'Tis then in bucketfuls I fall
And ruin every wicket,
For Rain shall reign the whole year out,
Sing hey-ho for rheumatics,
And mushrooms, ducks and tadpoles sprout
While Sol hides in his attics."

CHORUS. "And this is the law that I'll declare," etc.

[*Exeunt* RAIN *and* MONTHS.

[*As* RAIN *and the* MONTHS *go out the* CLERK *rises, and addresses* MISS SMITH *as if she were a public meeting.*

THE CLERK. And that, madam, is the reply to your question: that is how the weather is made.

[*But he is, you recall, an Oxford man, which is why, perceiving* MISS SMITH *to be about to rise, he gallantly assists her.*

Pray allow me.

MISS SMITH. Thank you.

[*And now she is on her feet, receiving from him her umbrella and her Burberry.*

THE CLERK. You don't by any chance feel that you owe me something coloured like an apology? [*She doesn't, so he reminds her.*] You remember your suggestion that I knew nothing about the weather?

MISS SMITH. I'm certainly thankful that I have not had to use this.

[*Which is her umbrella: and we hope that is what she says. But weather is weather, and if this play is being performed out of doors,* MISS SMITH *may have to say something regrettably different. She won't, of course, have used her own umbrella, because that would mask the* MONTHS *and would be impolite. But other people may have had to use theirs, and in that case what* MISS SMITH *says is: "I know that it is never safe to come out without an umbrella: not even on the most auspicious occasions."*

But—[*that is, if it has been fine, and "and" if it hasn't*]—you don't seem to be able to control the weather in the least.

THE CLERK. That is only too true, and only too easy of explanation. The months should have been men, but they are women, and who can control the caprice of a woman?

MISS SMITH. Are you being rude ?

THE CLERK. No : but I'm experienced.

MISS SMITH. I think your experience is quite local, Mr Clerk. There are parts of the world where the sun shines by the calendar. I'm very much inclined to go West.

THE CLERK. Where to ?

MISS SMITH. Well, California, for instance.

THE CLERK. Oh, no ! No ! Please don't do that.

MISS SMITH. Why not ?

THE CLERK. Because they have a settled sky and an unsettled earth and——

MISS SMITH. Pooh ! You're trying to frighten me with fairy-tales.

THE CLERK. No, I'm not. Look here, couldn't we go somewhere and have tea together ? Then we can thrash it all out, and I'll—I'll tell you why I don't want you to go to California.

MISS SMITH. I don't think you'll convince me, but I shall be charmed to come to tea.

THE CLERK [*taking her Burberry and umbrella and not caring if they do go absurdly with his fine clothes*]. Ah, but you never know what may happen after two people have tea'd together. [*He arms her towards exit.*] By the way, did you mention your Christian name ?

MISS SMITH. I didn't mention either name.

THE CLERK. But a Christian name comes first, doesn't it ?

[*By this time they have reached the exit, and as everybody ought to be satisfied that they are getting on together so well that* MISS SMITH *won't change her skies, there is no reason why they should not make their exit. So they go out to what, we imagine, is not their last tea-partnership, and, of course, after that—— Well, there it is.*

THE GOLDEN DOOM

By Lord Dunsany

CHARACTERS

The King
The King's Chamberlain
The Chief Prophet
Two Prophets
Two Sentries
Three Spies
A Boy
A Girl
A Stranger
Soldiers, Attendants, etc.

Time. *Some while before the fall of Babylon.*

While in fiction Lord Dunsany has moved from short stories of a dreaming and barbaric East to long chronicles of romantic Spain, he is one of the few writers who, ignoring the refractory West-End managers, continues to express himself in the form of the one-act play. Occasionally these plays are so short as to be comparable, in their brevity and their witty making of a single point, with the better sort of revue sketches. But generally they are fastidiously worded specimens of decorative drama, distinguished beyond most modern work for their audacious imagination. Sometimes they are ferocious conflicts of gods with men; sometimes the rollicking Irish humour which inspired "A Story of Land and Sea" will lead, through comedy, to a gentler conclusion. It is the strange East of Lord Dunsany's inventing which lends colour to the following play. In "The Golden Doom," as in all he does, a highly individual artist is at work.

THE GOLDEN DOOM[1]

SCENE: *Outside the* KING'S *great door in Zericon. Two* SENTRIES *pace to and fro, then halt, one on each side of the great door.*

FIRST SENTRY. The day is deadly sultry.

SECOND SENTRY. I would that I were swimming down the Gyshon, on the cool side, under the fruit-trees.

FIRST SENTRY. It is like to thunder, or the fall of a dynasty.

SECOND SENTRY. It will grow cool by nightfall. Where is the King?

FIRST SENTRY. He rows in his golden barge with ambassadors or whispers with captains concerning future wars. The stars spare him.

SECOND SENTRY. Why do you say "the stars spare him"?

FIRST SENTRY. Because if a doom from the stars fall suddenly on a king it swallows up his people and all things round about him, and his palace falls and the walls of his city and citadel, and the apes come in from the woods and the large beasts from the desert so that you would not say that a king had been there at all.

SECOND SENTRY. But why should a doom from the stars fall on the King?

[1] Published by Messrs G. P. Putnam's Sons (paper covers, 1s. net). Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

FIRST SENTRY. Because he seldom placates them.

SECOND SENTRY. Ah, I have heard that said of him.

FIRST SENTRY. Who are the stars that a man should scorn them. Should they that rule the thunder, the plague, and the earthquake withhold these things save for much prayer? Always ambassadors are with the King, and his commanders come in from distant lands, prefects of cities and makers of the laws, but never the priests of the stars.

SECOND SENTRY. Hark! Was that thunder?

FIRST SENTRY. Believe me, the stars are angry.

[*Enter a* STRANGER. *He wanders towards the* KING'S *door, gazing about him.*

SENTRIES [*lifting their spears at him*]. Go back! Go back!

STRANGER. Why?

FIRST SENTRY. It is death to touch the King's door.

STRANGER. I am a stranger from Thessaly.

FIRST SENTRY. It is death even for a stranger.

STRANGER. Your door is strangely sacred.

FIRST SENTRY. It is death to touch it.

[STRANGER *wanders off. Enter two children hand in hand.*

BOY [*to* SENTRY]. I want to see the King to pray for a hoop. [SENTRY *smiles.*

BOY [*pushes the door, to* GIRL]. I cannot open it. [*To* SENTRY] Will it do as well if I pray to the King's door?

SENTRY. Yes, quite as well. [*Turns to talk to the other* SENTRY.] Is there anyone in sight?

SECOND SENTRY [*shading his eyes*]. Nothing but a dog, and he far out on the plain.

FIRST SENTRY. Then we can talk awhile and eat bash.

BOY. King's door, I want a little hoop.

[*The* SENTRIES *take a little bash between finger and*

thumb from pouches and put that wholly forgotten drug to their lips.

GIRL [*pointing*]. My father is a taller soldier than that.

BOY. My father can write. He taught me.

GIRL. Ho! Writing frightens nobody: my father is a soldier.

BOY. I have a lump of gold. I found it in the stream that runs down to Gyshon.

GIRL. I have a poem. I found it in my own head.

BOY. Is it a long poem?

GIRL. No. But it would have been only there were no more rhymes for sky.

BOY. What is your poem?

GIRL. "I saw a purple bird
Go up against the sky,
And it went up and up
And round about did fly."

BOY. I saw it die.

GIRL. That doesn't scan.

BOY. Oh, that doesn't matter.

GIRL. Do you like my poem?

BOY. Birds aren't purple.

GIRL. My bird was.

BOY. Oh!

GIRL. Oh, you don't like my poem.

BOY. Yes, I do.

GIRL. No, you don't; you think it horrid.

BOY. No, I don't.

GIRL. Yes, you do. Why didn't you say you liked it? It is the only poem I ever made.

BOY. I do like it. I do like it.

GIRL. You don't, you don't.

BOY. Don't be angry. I'll write it on the door for you.

GIRL. You'll *write* it!

BOY. Yes, I can write. My father taught me. I'll write it with my lump of gold. It makes a yellow mark on the iron door.

GIRL. Oh, do write it. I would like to see it written like real poetry. [BOY *begins to write.* GIRL *watches.*

FIRST SENTRY. You see, we'll be fighting again soon.

SECOND SENTRY. Only a little war. We never have more than a little war with the hill-folk.

FIRST SENTRY. When a man goes to fight the curtains of the gods wax thicker than ever before between his eyes and the future, he may go to a great or to a little war.

SECOND SENTRY. There can only be a little war with the hill-folk.

FIRST SENTRY. Yet sometimes the gods laugh.

SECOND SENTRY. At whom?

FIRST SENTRY. At kings.

SECOND SENTRY. Why have you grown uneasy about this war in the hills?

FIRST SENTRY. Because the King is powerful beyond any of his fathers, and has more fighting-men, more horses, and wealth than could have ransomed his father and his grandfather and dowered their queens and daughters; and every year his miners bring him more from the opal mines and from the turquoise quarries. He has grown very mighty.

SECOND SENTRY. Then he will the more easily crush the hill-folk in a little war.

FIRST SENTRY. When kings grow very mighty the stars grow very jealous.

BOY. I have written your poem.

GIRL. Oh, have you really?

BOY. Yes, I'll read it to you.

[*Reads*] "I saw a purple bird
Go up against the sky,
And it went up and up
And round about did fly.
I saw it die."

GIRL. It doesn't scan.

BOY. That doesn't matter.

[*Enter furtively a* SPY, *he crosses stage, exit. The sentries cease to talk.*

GIRL. That man frightens me.

BOY. He is only one of the King's spies.

GIRL. But I don't like the King's spies. They frighten me.

BOY. Come on then, we'll run away.

SENTRY [*noticing children again*]. Go away, go away. The King is coming, he will eat you.

[BOY *throws a stone at the* SENTRY *and exit. Enter another* SPY, *he crosses the stage. Enter third* SPY, *he notices the door. Examines it and utters an owl-like whistle. No.* 2 *comes back. They do not speak. Both whistle. No.* 3 *comes. All examine the door. Enter the* KING *and his* CHAMBERLAIN. *The* KING *wears a purple robe.* SENTRIES *smartly transfer their spears to their left hands and return their right arms to their right sides. They then lower their spears until their points are within an inch of the ground, at the same time raising their right hands above their heads. They stand for some moments thus. Then they lower their right arms to their right sides at the same time raising their spears. In the next motion they take their spears into their right hands and lower the butts to the floor where they were before, the spears slanting forward a little. Both sentries must move together precisely.*

FIRST SPY [*runs forward to the* KING *and kneels abasing his forehead to the floor, loq.*]. Something has written on the iron door.

CHAMBERLAIN. On the iron door!

KING. Some fool has done it. Who has been here since yesterday?

FIRST SENTRY [*shifts his hand a little higher on his spear, brings the spear to his side and closes his heels all in one motion, he then takes one pace backwards with his right foot, then he kneels on his right knee. When he has done this he speaks, but not before*]. Nobody, Majesty, but a stranger from Thessaly.

KING. Did he touch the iron door?

FIRST SENTRY. No, Majesty; he tried to, but we drove him away.

KING. How near did he come?

FIRST SENTRY. Nearly to our spears, Majesty.

KING. What was his motive in seeking to touch the iron door?

FIRST SENTRY. I do not know, Majesty.

KING. Which way did he go?

FIRST SENTRY [*pointing left*]. That way, Majesty, an hour ago.

[*The* KING *whispers with one of his* SPIES, *who stoops and examines the ground and steals away.* SENTRY *rises.*

KING [*to his two remaining* SPIES]. What does this writing say?

A SPY. We cannot read, Majesty.

KING. A good spy should know everything.

SECOND SPY. We watch, Majesty, and we search out, Majesty. We read shadows, and we read footprints, and whispers in secret places. But we do not read writing.

KING [*to* CHAMBERLAIN]. See what it is.

CHAMBERLAIN [*goes up and reads*]. It is treason, Majesty.

KING. Read it.

CHAMBERLAIN.

"I saw a purple bird
Go up against the sky,
And it went up and up
And round about did fly.
I saw it die."

FIRST SENTRY [*aside*]. The stars have spoken.

KING [*to* SENTRY]. Has anyone been here but the stranger from Thessaly?

SENTRY [*kneeling as before*]. Nobody, Majesty.

KING. You saw nothing?

FIRST SENTRY. Nothing but a dog far out upon the plain and the children of the guard at play.

KING [*to* SECOND SENTRY]. And you?

SECOND SENTRY [*kneeling*]. Nothing, Majesty.

CHAMBERLAIN. That is strange.

KING. It is some secret warning.

CHAMBERLAIN. It is treason.

KING. It is from the stars.

CHAMBERLAIN. No, no, Majesty. Not from the stars, not from the stars. Some man has done it. Yet the thing should be interpreted. Shall I send for the prophets of the stars?

[*The* KING *beckons to his* SPIES. *They run up to him.*

KING. Find me some prophet of the stars. [*Exeunt* SPIES.] I fear that we may go no more, my chamberlain, along the winding ways of unequalled Zericon, nor play dahoori with the golden balls. I have thought more of my people than of the stars and more of Zericon than of windy heaven.

CHAMBERLAIN. Believe me, Majesty, some idle man has written it and passed by. Your spies shall find him, and then his name will be soon forgotten.

KING. Yes, yes. Perhaps you are right, though the sentries saw no one. No doubt some beggar did it.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, Majesty, some beggar has surely done it. But look, here come two prophets of the stars. They shall tell us that this is idle.

[*Enter two* PROPHETS, *a* BOY *attending them. All bow deeply to the* KING. *The two* SPIES *steal in again and stand at back.*

KING. Some beggar has written a rhyme on the iron gate, and as the ways of rhyme are known to you I desired you, rather as poets than as prophets, to say whether there was any meaning in it.

CHAMBERLAIN. 'Tis but an idle rhyme.

FIRST PROPHET [*bows again and goes up to the door. He glances at the writing, loq.*]. Come hither, servant of those that serve the stars. [ATTENDANT *approaches.*

FIRST PROPHET. Bring hither our golden cloaks, for this may be a matter for rejoicing; and bring our green cloaks also, for this may tell of young new beautiful things with which the stars will one day gladden the King; and bring our black cloaks also, for it may be a doom. [*Exit* BOY. PROPHET *goes up to door and reads solemnly.*] The stars have spoken. [*Re-enter* ATTENDANT *with cloaks.*

KING. I tell you that some beggar has written this.

FIRST PROPHET. It is written in pure gold.

[*He dons the black cloak over body and head.*

KING. What do the stars mean? What warning is it?

FIRST PROPHET. I cannot say. [*He walks away, chanting.*] Larimonas. Lahee, lahee, larimonas. Eleerithon. Eilab. Areelonar.

KING [*to* SECOND PROPHET]. Come you, then, and tell us what the warning is.

SECOND PROPHET [*goes up to door and reads*]. The stars have spoken. [*He cloaks himself in black.*

KING. What is it ? What does it mean ?

SECOND PROPHET. We do not know, but it is from the stars.

CHAMBERLAIN. It is a harmless thing ; there is no harm in it, Majesty. Why should not birds die ?

SECOND PROPHET. Larimonas. Lahee, lahee, larimonas. Eleerithon. Eilab. Areelonar.

KING. Why have the prophets covered themselves in black ?

CHAMBERLAIN. They are a secret people and look for inner meanings. There is no harm in it.

KING. They have covered themselves in black.

CHAMBERLAIN. They have not spoken of any evil thing. They have not spoken of it.

KING. If the people see the prophets covered in black they will say that the stars are against me and believe that my luck has turned.

CHAMBERLAIN. The people must not know.

KING. Some prophet must interpret to us the doom. Let the chief prophet of the stars be sent for.

CHAMBERLAIN [*going towards left exit*]. Summon the chief prophet of the stars that look on Zericon.

VOICES OFF. The chief prophet of the stars. The chief prophet of the stars.

CHAMBERLAIN. I have summoned the chief prophet, Majesty.

KING. If he interpret this aright I will put a necklace of turquoises round his neck with opals from the mines.

CHAMBERLAIN. He will not fail. He is a very cunning interpreter.

KING. What if he covers himself with a huge black cloak and does not speak and goes muttering away, slowly, with bended head, till our fear spreads to the sentries and they cry aloud ?

CHAMBERLAIN. This is no doom from the stars, but some idle scribe hath written it in his insolence upon the iron door, wasting his hoard of gold.

KING. Not for myself I have a fear of doom, not for myself: but I inherited a rocky land, a windy and ill-nurtured, and nursed it to prosperity by years of peace and spread its boundaries by years of war. I have brought harvests up out of barren acres and given good laws unto naughty towns, and my people are happy, and lo! the stars are angry.

CHAMBERLAIN. It is not the stars, it is not the stars, Majesty, for the prophets of the stars have not interpreted it. Indeed it was only some reveller wasting his gold.

[*Meanwhile enter* CHIEF PROPHET *of the stars that look on Zericon.*

KING. Chief Prophet of the stars that look on Zericon, I would have you interpret the rhyme upon yonder door.

CHIEF PROPHET [*goes up to the door and reads, loq.*]. It is from the stars.

KING. Interpret it and you shall have great turquoises round your neck, with opals from the mines in the frozen mountains.

CHIEF PROPHET [*cloaks himself like the others in a great black cloak, loq.*]. Who should wear purple in the land but a king, or who go up against the sky but he who has troubled the stars by neglecting their ancient worship? Such an one has gone up and up, increasing power and wealth, such an one has soared above the crowns of those that went before him, such an one the stars have doomed, the undying ones, the illustrious. [*A pause.*

KING. Who wrote it?

CHIEF PROPHET. It is pure gold. Some god has written it.

CHAMBERLAIN. Some god?

CHIEF PROPHET. Some god whose home is among the undying stars.

FIRST SENTRY [*aside to* SECOND]. Last night I saw a star go flaming earthwards.

CHIEF PROPHET. Larimonas. Lahee, lahee, larimonas. Eleerithon. Eilab. Areelonar.

KING. Is this a warning or is it a doom ?

CHIEF PROPHET. The stars have spoken.

KING. It is then a doom ?

CHIEF PROPHET. They speak not in jest.

KING. I have been a great king. . . . Let it be said of me, " The stars overthrew him, and they sent a god for his doom." For I have not met my equal among kings that man should overthrow me ; and I have not oppressed my people that man should rise up against me.

CHIEF PROPHET. It is better to give worship to the stars than to do good to man. It is better to be humble before the gods than proud in the face of your enemy though he do evil.

KING. Let the stars hearken yet and I will sacrifice a child to them. I will sacrifice a girl-child to the twinkling stars and a male child to the stars that blink not, the stars of the steadfast eyes. [*To his* SPIES] Let a boy and a girl be brought for sacrifice. [*Exit a* SPY *right, looking at footprints.*] Will you accept this sacrifice to the god that the stars have sent ? They say that the gods love children.

CHIEF PROPHET. I may refuse no sacrifice to the stars, nor to the gods whom they send. [*To other* PROPHETS] Make ready the sacrificial knives.

[PROPHETS *draw knives and sharpen them.*

KING. Is it fitting that the sacrifice take place by the iron door where the god from the stars has trod, or must it be in the temple ?

CHIEF PROPHET. Let it be offered by the iron door. [*To other* PROPHETS] Fetch hither the altar-stone.

[*The owl-like whistle is heard off right. Third* SPY *runs crouching towards it. Exit.*

KING. Will this sacrifice avail to avert the doom ?

CHIEF PROPHET. Who knows ?

KING. I fear that even yet the doom will fall.

CHIEF PROPHET. It were wise to sacrifice some greater thing.

KING. What more can a man offer ?

CHIEF PROPHET. His pride.

KING. What pride ?

CHIEF PROPHET. Your pride that went up against the sky and troubled the stars.

KING. How shall I sacrifice my pride to the stars ?

CHIEF PROPHET. It is upon your pride that the doom will fall, and will take away your crown and will take away your kingdom.

KING. I will sacrifice my crown and reign uncrowned amongst you, so only I save my kingdom.

CHIEF PROPHET. If you sacrifice your crown, which is your pride, and if the stars accept it, perhaps the god that they sent may avert the doom and you may still reign in your kingdom, though humbled and uncrowned.

KING. Shall I burn my crown with spices and with incense or cast it into the sea ?

CHIEF PROPHET. Let it be laid here by the iron door where the god came who wrote the golden doom. When he comes again by night to shrivel up the city or to pour an enemy in through the iron door he will see your cast-off pride and perhaps accept it and take it away to the neglected stars.

KING [*to* CHAMBERLAIN]. Go after my spies and say that I make no sacrifice. [*Exit* CHAMBERLAIN, *right. Taking*

off his crown] Good-bye, my brittle glory; kings have sought you; the stars have envied you.

[*The stage grows darker.*

CHIEF PROPHET. Even now the sun has set who denies the stars, and the day is departed wherein no gods walk abroad. It is near the hour when spirits roam the earth and all things that go unseen, and the faces of the abiding stars will be soon revealed to the fields. Lay your crown there and let us come away.

[*The* KING *lays his crown and sceptre before the iron door.*

KING [*to* SENTRIES]. Go. And let no man come near the door all night.

SENTRIES [*kneeling*]. Yes, Majesty.

[*They remain kneeling until after the* KING *has gone.* KING *and* CHIEF PROPHET *walk away.*

CHIEF PROPHET. It was your pride. Let it be forgotten. May the stars accept it. [*Exeunt left. The* SENTRIES *rise.*

FIRST SENTRY. The stars have envied him!

SECOND SENTRY. It is an ancient crown. He wore it well.

FIRST SENTRY. May the stars accept it.

SECOND SENTRY. If they do not accept it what doom will overtake him?

FIRST SENTRY. It will suddenly be as though there were never any city of Zericon, nor two sentries like you and me standing before the door.

SECOND SENTRY. Why! How do you know?

FIRST SENTRY. That is ever the way of the gods.

SECOND SENTRY. But it is unjust.

FIRST SENTRY. How should the gods know that?

SECOND SENTRY. Will it happen to-night?

FIRST SENTRY. Come, we must march away.

[*Exeunt right. The stage grows increasingly darker.*

Re-enter CHAMBERLAIN, *right. He walks across*

the stage. Exit left. Re-enter SPIES, *right. They cross the stage. The stage is now nearly dark. Enter* BOY, *right, dressed in white—his hands out a little.*

BOY. King's door, King's door, I want my little hoop.

[*He goes up to the* KING'S *door. When he sees the* KING'S *crown there he utters a satisfied "Oh-h!" He takes it up and puts it on the ground and beating it before him with the sceptre goes out by the way that he entered. The great door opens, there is light within; a furtive* SPY *slips out, sees crown is gone. Another* SPY *slips out. Their crouching heads come close together.*

FIRST SPY [*hoarse whisper*]. The gods have come.

[*They run back through the door and the door is closed. It opens again and the* KING *and* CHAMBERLAIN *come through.*

KING. The stars are satisfied.

CURTAIN

RORY AFORESAID

By John Brandane

CHARACTERS

MacConnachie, *the Court Officer*
Duncan MacCallum, *merchant and small sheep-farmer at Ardnish*
Rory MacColl, *shepherd to Mr MacCallum*
Mr MacIntosh, *an Oban lawyer*
The Sheriff-Substitute, *also from Oban*
Mrs MacLean, *a crofter widow-woman*

Time. *The present.*
Place. *West Highlands.*

"Rory Aforesaid" is founded on "La Farce de Maître Patelin," an old French play (fifteenth century) of unknown authorship.

"EASILY the best and most representative of the comedies," writes Mr Norman Marshall in an article on the Scottish National Theatre Society, "is John Brandane's 'The Glen is Mine,'" and general critical opinion is inclined to place that play rather higher than "The Lifting." With these two plays Mr Brandane becomes the acknowledged chieftain of the new Scottish school, though perhaps nothing of his quite equals the one-act tragedy "Campbell of Kilmhor," which is printed in the First Series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*.

"Rory Aforesaid" is lighter metal, being the Scottish adaptation of a humorous fifteenth-century French play "La Farce de Maître Patelin." It is interesting to note, incidentally, that the well-known expression *Revenons à nos moutons* had its origin in the French prototype.

John Brandane is the pseudonym of a Scottish dramatist who lives in Glasgow.

RORY AFORESAID[1]

SCENE: *The Court-house at Torlochan: a large chamber with whitewashed walls, panelled in lower part with yellow pine. Two tall, gaunt windows at back with a door between. To the left is the* SHERIFF'S *desk on a platform—a table for his clerk at the side of it. To the right are benches for the public. In the centre of the floor is the table for the solicitors, with chairs around it. Between the table and the right-hand side of the* SHERIFF'S *desk is the witness-stand.*

DUNCAN MACCALLUM, *merchant and sheep-farmer from Ardnish, is walking up and down the empty chamber to keep himself warm, for there is an October chill in the air. He is an erect old man of sixty, with grizzled hair and beard. He wears a square-topped hat, and a muffler is wound over the collar of his stout overcoat. To him there enters the* COURT OFFICER, MACCONNACHIE, *a man of fifty, with his few remaining dark hairs carefully combed in separate lines across the bald portion of his scalp. He wears a black tie, and his square-cut coat has an official look.*

COURT OFFICER. Will you not be coming in to the fire in the waiting-room, Mr MacCallum? It's cold in this big tomb of a place.

MACCALLUM. No, no! I'm fine here. I want to get used

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to the Scottish National Theatre Society 140 Douglas Street, Glasgow, C.2, or to Mr Le Roy Phillips, 41 Winter Street, Boston Massachusetts, U.S.A.

to the Court, you see. I'm forty miles from home, you understand ; and I just feel like a fish out of water.

COURT OFFICER. Och, don't be exciting yourself, now.

MACCALLUM [*looking at a yellow paper in his hand*]. What a lot of " saids " and " aforesaids " they put into a summons !

COURT OFFICER. Well, that's the law, you see. When a lawyer's making a speech he feels fine if he says " aforesaid," every now and again.

MACCALLUM. Do you tell me now ? I never thought of that ! [*He reads.*] " The sheep aforesaid "—yes, yes—you'd think it was a very special sheep, if you said it that way. I wonder now if I could be trying that myself when I'm giving my evidence ? " Rory MacColl aforesaid." That's fine !

COURT OFFICER. Och, now, don't you be trying any of that nonsense !

MACCALLUM. Well, I'll just be going over in my own mind what I'll be saying to the Sheriff ; and then I'll feel more at home, when he comes in, you understand. This will be the witness-box ? [*He crosses to witness-stand.*

COURT OFFICER. It is that.

MACCALLUM. There would be no harm in my standing in it for a wee minute, just to accustom myself to the way I would be feeling when my turn comes ?

COURT OFFICER. No harm at all, Mr MacCallum ! Go you in and welcome !

MACCALLUM. Och, you're very kind—very kind—indeed, yes. [*He goes to witness-stand, and holds up his right hand, mumbling over the words of the oath to himself, then smiles, bows, and steps down.*] Yes, yes, I'll be doing fine. All the same I'd feel easier if my lawyer was with me this day.

COURT OFFICER. And have you no lawyer then for this case ?

MACCALLUM. Well, I was to have had Mr Thomson from the Oban—the young one—the good one ; but the ten o'clock steamer could not take the pier this morning because

of the high wind ; and the poor man will have been carried on to Mallaig most likely. It's a good thing I came myself by last night's steamer.

COURT OFFICER. It's peety for Mr Thomson being taken so far out of his way.

MACCALLUM. Och, well, it's a lawyer's fee saved. And I'll do as well as any lawyer when it comes to the bit.

COURT OFFICER. All the same I like to see a man with his lawyer when a Court is held.

MACCALLUM. But man, man ! What need of a lawyer when I saw Rory kill the sheep with my own eyes ? A fine sheep it was, too—as fine a gimmer as ever you saw, Mr MacConnachie.

COURT OFFICER. So I was hearing, but you're forty miles away as you say ; and we didna hear much of the business at this end of the country.

[*The door at back opens, and* RORY MACCOLL *comes in. He is a Highland shepherd, aged sixty, and carries a cromag, or long crook of hazel. His bearded face is old and weathered, as is also his suit of rough homespun. His eyes are sharp and twinkling. At sight of him* MACCALLUM *turns away in disgust.*

RORY. A fine day, Mr MacCallum.

[MACCALLUM *does not reply.* RORY *looks up and round the Court-house inquiringly. The* COURT OFFICER *goes towards him.*

COURT OFFICER. Good day ! Are you in this case ?

RORY. I am that. It's a great stack of stones, this Court-house. What time will you be wanting me ?

[*He hands some yellow papers to the* COURT OFFICER.

COURT OFFICER [*reading them*]. Och ! it's you, is it ?—Rory MacColl. Eleven o'clock. You'll be having half an hour to wait.

RORY. Half an hour! Is there an Inns in this place?

COURT OFFICER. There is that. But if I were you, I'd not go near the Inns till your case is over. There's a fire in the waiting-room out there.

RORY. But they'll have a fire in the Inns, too?

COURT OFFICER. I'm thinking the waiting-room fire will be safer for the like of you, Rory.

RORY [*grinning, as he goes out easily*]. Well, I could be taking a look at both of them, surely.

MACCALLUM [*fuming*]. Did you hear that? The cheek of him! Killing my sheep, and then wishing me a good-day, as cool as you like!

COURT OFFICER. So that's the man, is it? What way did you not have the police take him up on a criminal charge?

MACCALLUM. 'Deed and I don't know why the police would not do that same, when I asked them. They just said there was too much sheep's-head broth in it, and advised me to claim for damages.

COURT OFFICER. Only a small debt case, is it? Well, well.

MACCALLUM. Aye, just that. But wait you, and see if it will not turn out a perjury case, before we're done with it. Wait till you hear Rory swearing away his soul this day! You never heard his like for the great flow of language —English or Gaelic, it's all the same to Rory—there's no stopping the lying tongue of him!

COURT OFFICER. As bad as that!

MACCALLUM. Aye, as bad as that! Wait you! For if this place is not struck by lightning as soon as Rory opens his dirty mouth my name is not Duncan MacCallum.

COURT OFFICER. Och, if it's lies brings down the lightning, this place would have been rock and lime long ago.

MACCALLUM. Well, well! And is that the way of it?

[MR MACINTOSH, *a lawyer from Oban, enters, carrying a black gown on his arm. He is a man of fifty,*

clean-shaven, and bald-headed. He has narrow, quizzing eyes.

COURT OFFICER. Good day, Mr MacIntosh!

MACINTOSH. Oh, good day, Mr MacConnachie! Look here, this isn't the gown I left here a week ago.

COURT OFFICER. I'm sorry, Mr MacIntosh. Some of the other lawyers must have taken yours last Tuesday. Just you be doing with that one for to-day.

MACINTOSH. It's a confounded nuisance, you know.

[*He turns to go out.*

MACCALLUM [*coming forward*]. Good day to you, sir!

MACINTOSH. Oh, good day! I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure of knowing you.

COURT OFFICER. This is the pursuer, sir—Mr MacCallum of Ardnish.

MACCALLUM. Yes, yes. Now isn't it strange that you'll not remember me? You got some Harris tweed out of my shop at Ardnish, a year ago last August.

MACINTOSH. Ardnish? I was never in Ardnish all my life, I'm sorry to say. But a fine place, I hear.

MACCALLUM. Och, yes, but you *were* in Ardnish. Yes, yes—a year ago last August. And I mistook you for a Mr MacFarlane, a great salmon-fisher what was staying at Ardnish Hotel.

MACINTOSH. Well, I'm no salmon-fisher, Mr MacCallum. And I was never in Ardnish at any time. You're mistaken.

MACCALLUM. Am I saying you are a salmon-fisher? . . . All I'm saying is that there was an excursion steamer in from Oban on the day you took the tweed off me. There were many strangers about that day, and you were one of them. And the name you had then was not MacIntosh, but MacFarlane, and, having that name, I thought you were the great salmon-fisher from the Hotel.

MACINTOSH. Sir, do you doubt my word? I tell you again I was never in Ardnish in all my life!

MACCALLUM. Och, yes, but you were. A year ago last August. And off you went with ten good yards of Harris tweed in your trap, just in time to catch the steamer, as I found out afterwards. And that tweed was never paid for. And me not seeing you from that day to this.

MACINTOSH. Is this a joke, sir?

MACCALLUM. No joke about it. It was ten yards of Harris tweed, and never a penny did I get for it.

MACINTOSH. I tell you, sir, it must have been somebody else.

MACCALLUM. And I tell you I never forget a face or a voice. And what I say to you is: Pay me for the tweed you stole away from me a year ago last August.

MACINTOSH. Stole?—stole? You hear what this man says, MacConnachie? [*He takes out paper and pencil, and makes a note hurriedly.*] He accuses me of theft; and I take you as a witness.

COURT OFFICER. Och, no, no! I've enough to do with putting other people into the witness-box, let alone myself! For goodness' sake, be settling it among yourselves!

MACINTOSH. But this is too serious a matter to pass over, Mr MacConnachie. Excuse me a moment. [*He goes to door at back, and calls.*] Mr MacColl! [RORY *enters.*] This isn't your case yet, Mr MacColl. But something almost as important. [MACCALLUM *moves away, but* MACINTOSH *puts a hand on his arm.*] Just a moment, sir. Will you now have the kindness to repeat before this good man the words you have just used about myself?

MACCALLUM. Good man? And who are you calling a good man? [*Then to* RORY] Well, you may be a good man, as Neil of the Mountain said to the cat, but you haven't the face of one.

RORY. And who are you to be talking? You're nothing

but a whistle and a noise, when all's said and done. Man, man ! you'd make a stirk laugh.

MACINTOSH. Never mind, Mr MacColl. Just let him repeat what he said a moment ago in the presence of Mr MacConnachie here.

MACCALLUM. 'Deed, and I'll do nothing so foolish. But I'll be seeing my lawyer to-morrow, about you and my Harris tweed.

MACINTOSH. What Harris tweed ?

MACCALLUM. The Harris tweed you stole from me last August !

MACINTOSH. Ah ! I thought that would fetch you. You heard, Rory ? He said " stole."

RORY. He did that.

MACCALLUM. Och, I'll be staying here no longer with such a pair of thieves.

RORY. Well, it's a poor pair that's no match for one, anyway. [MACCALLUM *flounces out, shouting :*

MACCALLUM. I said thieves and I'll stick to it, look you !

MACINTOSH. You observe, Rory ? He said " thieves." You heard, MacConnachie. Please take a note, both of you. [*He scribbles industriously himself.*

COURT OFFICER. Och, I'm not taking any notes. I've my own work to attend to. [*He goes out angrily.*

MACINTOSH [*still scribbling*]. All right ! Please take a note, Rory, that Mr MacConnachie refused to take a note, will you ?

RORY. Och, no need for notes, for I'll be minding all he said. And I'm no scholar with the pen, anyway.

MACINTOSH [*shutting his notebook with a snap, angrily*]. The idea ! Why, I never was in Ardnish in all my life ! Called me a thief, did he ? Well, he'll find it's not one penny will settle this little business before I've finished with him !

RORY. Yes, yes ! But about my own case, now ? You

were saying you would be giving me the good advice before the Court started.

MACINTOSH. It's awkward doing that here. Somebody might come in. And we've lost time, too, with that fool and his Harris tweed. [*He makes for the door, but turns.*] No, we can't go into the witness-room now. Tell you what! Put your foot against that door. [RORY *does so.*] Thank you. And now I'll give you a few hints. [*He paces up and down, cogitating.*] The old ruffian! Called me a thief! Well, we'll see. Tuts! Him and his Harris tweed!

RORY. I wish you'd leave that Harris tweed alone, and tell me what to say about the sheep I killed.

MACINTOSH. Aha! So you did kill it? Last Tuesday you told me that you didn't kill it!

RORY. Yes, yes; I told you that.

MACINTOSH. Well, will you go into that box to-day and swear on oath that you did not kill it?

RORY. Look you! Some of them poor sheep are that bad with the braxy that they're far better killed.

MACINTOSH. I know all that. But will you take your oath that you did not kill MacCallum's sheep?

RORY. Och, take an oath, is it?

MACINTOSH. Yes.

RORY. No, no! I have my religion; and I'll take no oath.

MACINTOSH. You say you did not kill this sheep?

RORY. No [*besitatingly*].

MACINTOSH. Then why not swear as before Almighty God that you didn't?

RORY. Och, no! I have my religion, you'll understand. I'm not liking that oath at all, at all.

MACINTOSH. Well, what are you going to tell the Sheriff?

RORY. I'll tell him MacCallum didn't see me kill the sheep.

MACINTOSH. But MacCallum will swear that he did see you.

RORY. Och, no, it was too dark that night. He couldna see me.

MACINTOSH. Man alive! You'll lose your case, if you say that! Look here, Rory! Unless you promise to take the oath, and say you didn't kill that sheep, I'll fling up your case.

RORY. Now, now, Mr MacIntosh, be you a good man! Don't you be angry with poor Rory. See you this! [*He turns out a dirty purse.*] Look at the good pound-notes I have for paying you—that is, if I'll win the case.

MACINTOSH. My good fellow, you must pay me, I'm afraid, whether you win or lose.

RORY. Och, is it pay you, if I lose? No, no!

MACINTOSH. Look here, you old humbug! I've had enough of this. You must promise me here and now to settle up as soon as the case is finished. Otherwise I'm off home with the one o'clock steamer.

RORY. Och, very well! The man that divides the pudding will have the thick end to himself, I can see! But I'll promise, if there are to be no oaths.

MACINTOSH. You are a stubborn old mule. Why! the Sheriff won't hear you, unless you take the oath.

RORY. I could be having a sore throat, look you, and no can speak.

MACINTOSH. Good! But no—that won't do. He'd ask you to nod your head very likely as he repeated the oath to you. Tell you what, though! Say something silly every time he addresses you, or when anyone speaks to you at all. Understand?

RORY [*parrot-fashion*]. "Something silly."

MACINTOSH. No, no! Say something different each time.

RORY [*parrot-fashion*]. "Something different each time." Will that do ?

MACINTOSH. You *are* an ass ! An ass ? Aha ! I've got it. You're not an ass, Rory, you're a sheep !

RORY. Is it me—a sheep ?

MACINTOSH. Yes, a sheep. And every time you're spoken to by way of question you must answer like a sheep. Like this—*Baa !* Understand ?

RORY. *Baa !*

MACINTOSH. Splendid. The Sheriff will think you're off your head, and ask you to stand down. Besides, since MacCallum has no lawyer with him he's sure to mix his case all up. We're in luck, old son, we're in luck ! Ha-ha !

RORY. Aye, laugh away ! But it may be no laughing for me, if the Sheriff gets cross. Man, man, if I had a boil, and you squeezing it, you'd still be laughing.

MACINTOSH. Sorry, Rory ! No offence ! But, tell me, who is MacCallum's agent ? It's quite true, isn't it, that he was carried past the pier in the ten o'clock steamer ?

RORY. Yes, it's true enough. It was Mr Thomson from the Oban.

MACINTOSH. Well, he can't get back to-day, anyway. Good thing I took the eight o'clock boat, or where would you have been, eh ?

RORY. *Baa !*

MACINTOSH. Splendid ! You'll look as daft as Lachie Gorra ! And MacCallum will be no better when I've finished cross-examining him, let me tell you. Besides, the Sheriff will be in a hurry. He always expects a round of golf before lunch on a Tuesday, if I know his little ways. You watch him scuttling off, as soon's we're through. Fine ! Fine ! [*He rubs his hands. Sound of voices outside door at back.*] Hush ! They're coming ! Quick ! Take your foot away from that door now.

[*They both come forward into the body of the Court-house.*

COURT OFFICER [*entering with* MACCALLUM]. Will you please sit here, Mr MacCallum ? [*He indicates table.*

MACCALLUM. Thank you, Mr MacConnachie.

[*He sits down at table, and, drawing out his notes, cons them carefully.* MACINTOSH *takes a seat at opposite end of table, and refers to his papers also.*

COURT OFFICER [*to* RORY]. You'll sit here, Rory. [*He indicates the front bench, facing the* SHERIFF'S *desk.*]

RORY. *Baa !*

COURT OFFICER. What did you say ?

RORY. *Baa !*

[MACCALLUM *looks up in astonishment. Some of the crofters and townsfolk who have entered titter, as they take their seats in the back benches.* COURT OFFICER *goes out, and ushers in the* SHERIFF, *bewigged and gowned.*]

COURT OFFICER. Court !

[*All stand, and after the* SHERIFF *has taken his seat sit again. The* COURT OFFICER *whispers to the* SHERIFF, *pointing to* MACCALLUM. *The* SHERIFF *puts his hand to his ear, and says : "Eh ?" The* COURT OFFICER *whispers more loudly. It is evident that his lordship is slightly deaf ; and from the way he peers at his papers it is also clear that he doesn't see very well. Throughout the ensuing scene his deafness and defective vision are clearly indicated by his various gestures. At times he does not make out who is addressing whom.*

SHERIFF. Ah, most unfortunate ! I'm sorry, Mr MacCallum, to hear that your solicitor has been carried past the pier, because of the storm this morning. That is so, isn't it ?

MACCALLUM. Yes, my lord.

SHERIFF. Then I suppose you will put forward your own case?

MACCALLUM. If you please, my lord.

SHERIFF. Very well. Go on.

[MACCALLUM *nods to* COURT OFFICER, *who goes out by door at back.*

COURT OFFICER [*in a loud voice*]. Mrs MacLean!

[MRS MACLEAN, *a stout Highland crofter-woman, with a shock of red hair, appears. She is flustered, and has an aggressive air, as she is ushered into the witness-box.*

SHERIFF. You are Mrs MacLean, Ardnish?

MRS MACLEAN. Yes, my lord.

SHERIFF [*holding up right hand*]. "I swear by Almighty God."

MRS MACLEAN [*holding up right hand*]. "I swear by Almighty God."

SHERIFF. "As I shall answer to God."

MRS MACLEAN. "As I shall answer to God."

SHERIFF. "At the great day of judgment."

MRS MACLEAN. "At the great day of judgment."

SHERIFF. "That I will tell the truth."

MRS MACLEAN. "That I will tell the truth."

SHERIFF. "The whole truth."

MRS MACLEAN. "The whole truth."

SHERIFF. "And nothing but the truth."

MRS MACLEAN. "And nothing but the truth."

MACCALLUM [*rising and turning over his papers excitedly.*] Mrs MacLean, was you very fond of sheep's-head broth?

MRS MACLEAN. I was that.

SHERIFF. Louder, please. I can't hear.

MRS MACLEAN. I—was—that.

SHERIFF. Thank you.

MACCALLUM. Was it known to the defender, the aforesaid Rory MacColl, that you was very fond of sheep's-head broth ?

MRS MACLEAN. It was that.

MACCALLUM. Did he ask yourself and Widow MacIver to a meal of sheep's-head broth on the day of the 28th March last ?

MRS MACLEAN. Was that a Thursday ?

MACCALLUM. It was that.

SHERIFF. A little louder, please. What did you say, Mr MacCallum ?

MACCALLUM. I said, " It was that," O lord—I mean *my* lord.

SHERIFF. Thank you ! Go on, Mrs MacLean. Tell us if that Thursday was the 28th of March.

MRS MACLEAN. Och, I'll no' can mind. But it was the day after Rory killed the sheep.

SHERIFF. Stop !—stop !—stop ! You really must not say a thing like that. It has not yet been proved that anybody killed a sheep. Answer the question—no more. You mean that it was on the day after Mr MacCallum's sheep was said to be killed ?

MRS MACLEAN. Said to be killed ? It *was* killed. How else could we have the sheep's-head broth ?

SHERIFF. But you must not say that. Just answer my question.

MRS MACLEAN. And where could Rory have got a sheep's head but from a sheep ?

SHERIFF. Ahem ! I am afraid, Mr MacCallum, I am trespassing on your field, but with your permission, I'll interrogate this witness myself. [MACCALLUM *bows and sits down, saying :*]

MACCALLUM. Certainly, O lord.

SHERIFF. Now, Mrs MacLean ! You had a meal of sheep's-

head broth with Rory MacColl on Thursday, the 28th day of March last ? Is that so ?

MRS MACLEAN. It was a Thursday, anyway.

SHERIFF. But is there nothing you can remember which happened about that time that will help you to the exact date ?

MRS MACLEAN. Well, I saw Rory having the sheep's head singed at the smiddy on the morning of the day we had the sheep's-head broth.

SHERIFF. Well, what morning was that ?

MRS MACLEAN. The morning after the night that Rory killed the sheep.

SHERIFF [*more in sorrow than in anger*]. That will do, Mrs MacLean. Any questions, Mr MacIntosh ?

MACINTOSH. No, my lord.

SHERIFF. Stand down, Mrs MacLean.

[*The* COURT OFFICER *leads the bewildered* MRS MACLEAN *out of the room.* MACCALLUM *leaves the table and enters the witness-box. He takes the oath in the same form as the former witness.*

SHERIFF. Well, tell us your story, Mr MacCallum.

MACCALLUM. My lord, having lost of late half a score of sheep, without having had from the aforesaid Rory MacColl a satisfactory account of their decease——

SHERIFF. Did you say " disease "?

MACCALLUM. Any way you like it, my lord. They were dead, anyway, my lord—or as good as dead, for I never saw them after the first dipping.

SHERIFF. Yes, yes. Go on, please. Time is short, Mr MacCallum. Never mind about the dipping.

MACCALLUM. I decided therefore to watch said defender, having suspected the deceased Rory—the aforesaid Rory—of having caused decease of sheep aforesaid. [MACINTOSH *laughs audibly behind his hand, hanging his*

head. MACCALLUM *hears him, and says angrily:*] Aye, laugh away, MacIntosh! But I'm not forgetting that Harris tweed!

SHERIFF [*not perceiving the cause of the interruption*]. What's this about tweed? We don't want anything irrelevant. Please let us keep to our sheep, and leave dippings and tweed alone.

MACCALLUM. Yes, my lord. And a fine sheep it was—as fine a gimmer as ever you saw. I watched Rory through a hole in the wall of the fank on the night of the 27th March last, and saw him kill the sheep—the said 27th of March being the night before the beforesaid sheep's-head broth was made by Rory aforesaid. [MACINTOSH *laughs again involuntarily.*] Aye, laugh away, Mr MacIntosh, but I'll be even with you yet!

SHERIFF. What's that? Whatever are you talking about, sir?

MACCALLUM. I'm talking about the good Harris tweed that was stole from me, and never paid for, O lord!

SHERIFF. I really can't follow you, Mr MacCallum. Let us come back to our sheep, if you please.

MACCALLUM. Very good, my lord. I saw Rory aforesaid cut off the head of my good gimmer before my very eyes, meaning said head, no doubt, for the sheep's-head broth to be made on the 28th March aforesaid. [MACINTOSH *laughs again.*] Yes, you may laugh! But all the same I'll make you pay for the ten yards of tweed you took away in your trap.

SHERIFF. Ten yards in a trap? Whatever are you saying now, Mr MacCallum? Who ever heard of ten yards of a sheep?

MACCALLUM. No, my lord. Ten yards of good Harris tweed. Crotal colour it was. And it never paid for, since a year ago last August.

SHERIFF. I really don't follow you. Do, please, let us get back to our sheep. I really wish you had a legal representative here, Mr MacCallum. Continue.

MACCALLUM. I saw him kill the sheep by cutting its throat first of all, my lord. And then, thinking maybe of the aforesaid sheep's-head broth, he cut off the sheep's head to make the broth aforesaid. [MACINTOSH *chuckles once more.*] Look at him laughing. But you did not laugh when you got into your trap and drove off with the Harris tweed you never paid for!

SHERIFF. Do I understand you to say that the defender caught the sheep in a trap? Was it a variety of sheep known as a Harris sheep? I thought that breed was extinct. . . . Is there still a variety called a Harris sheep? We used to call them St Kilda sheep in my young days. They had three horns or four, had they not?

MACCALLUM. My lord, it wasn't the sheep that was in the trap. It was the tweed—good Harris tweed, and crotal at that.

SHERIFF. Ah! You mean that the wool lost by the disappearance of the sheep was equivalent to so much good Harris tweed? Is that it? If that is so, never mind about the tweed just now. We are not concerned with the possible products of the sheep. Let us come back to the sheep itself. We are really not concerned with the tweed.

MACCALLUM. Well, if your lordship will allow me to say so, I'm really more concerned about the tweed than the sheep.

SHERIFF. Yes, yes, I know. But the sheep comes first, then the wool, then the spinning and the dyeing, then the weaving of the tweed. I know all that. But the sheep comes before the tweed, doesn't it?

MACCALLUM. Well, in this case it didn't, my lord. The tweed was stolen long before the sheep was killed. It was a year ago last August.

SHERIFF. Ahem! I am afraid I must ask you to discontinue, Mr MacCallum. Time is short; and I can't follow you into all these irrelevancies. . . . Now, Mr MacIntosh.

MACINTOSH. Mr MacCallum, you say you saw the defender kill the sheep on the night of the 27th March last?

MACCALLUM. I did that.

MACINTOSH. At what o'clock did you see this?

MACCALLUM. About nine o'clock.

MACINTOSH. Was there a moon that night?

MACCALLUM. No.

MACINTOSH. Had defender a light in the fank?

MACCALLUM. No.

MACINTOSH. What kind of knife had he?

MACCALLUM. I did not see the knife.

MACINTOSH. You did not see the knife? Why?

MACCALLUM. It was too dark.

MACINTOSH. So that you could not see the knife; and yet you saw him kill the sheep?

MACCALLUM. I heard him swearing at the sheep, and saying he'd soon kill it. And then I heard the poor beast struggling and groaning, and then it stopped all at once.

MACINTOSH. Ah! So you did not really *see* him kill the sheep? You *heard* him kill the sheep?

MACCALLUM. Yes. I heard him kill the sheep.

MACINTOSH. You heard some sounds, and you thought those sounds came from a sheep in process of being killed?

MACCALLUM. I heard him kill the sheep.

MACINTOSH. I understand. You admit then that you did not see him kill the sheep.

MACCALLUM. I heard him kill the sheep.

MACINTOSH. Very well. Now, Mr MacCallum, attend to me! Will you please tell his lordship if it is not the case that a sheep struggles and groans if some one gives it a dose of medicine?

MACCALLUM. It might well do that.

MACINTOSH. So that the struggling and groaning you heard might not have been the sounds of a sheep in process of being killed.

MACCALLUM. I heard him kill the sheep.

MACINTOSH. Very well. Now, will you please explain to his lordship what you mean when you say that you saw the defendant with a sheep of the species called Harris, and measuring ten yards ; the said sheep being caught in a trap ?

MACCALLUM. Never you mind what I mean, Mr MacIntosh, or Mr MacFarlane or whatever your name is ! . . . But I say you stole a roll of Harris tweed from me in Ardnish, a year ago last August ; and it's never paid for yet !

MACINTOSH [*sitting down*]. Thank you.

SHERIFF. That will do, Mr MacCallum. Stand down.

[MACCALLUM, *fuming, is led back to his seat at the table by the* COURT OFFICER. RORY *is then taken to witness-box, at a sign from* MACINTOSH.

COURT OFFICER. You're next, Rory.

MACINTOSH. His name is Rory MacColl, my lord—the defender, aged sixty-two. He hasn't much English.

SHERIFF [*writing*]. Very good. [*Then, holding up his right hand*] " I swear by Almighty God." [RORY *is silent.*] Repeat after me. " I swear "—he has some English, hasn't he, Mr MacIntosh ?

MACINTOSH. Oh, yes, my lord.

SHERIFF. Can you hear me ?

RORY. *Baa !*

SHERIFF. What do you say ?

RORY. *Baa !*

SHERIFF. I beg pardon. Again.

RORY. *Baa !*

SHERIFF. Is this man *compos mentis*, Mr MacIntosh ?

MACINTOSH. He has certainly been very queer of late, my

lord. Indeed, ever since this dreadful charge has been levelled against him he has been odd in his manner. He has always been of a gentle, trustful nature. And now that he finds the harsh realities of the world quite other than he had dreamt them to be, it may quite well have fallen out that his mind has become unhinged.

SHERIFF. My dear sir, if there are many more witnesses in this case like this man and his two predecessors my own mind will certainly become unhinged. See what you can make of him ; and then I'll sum up the case.

MACINTOSH. Thank you, my lord. Now attend to me, Mr MacColl. Did you ever at any time or under any circumstances kill a sheep belonging to Mr MacCallum ?

RORY. *Baa !*

MACINTOSH. Answer me properly, please. Where did you get the sheep's head, of which you made a broth ?

RORY. *Baa !*

MACINTOSH. Can't you understand what I say ?

RORY. *Baa !*

MACINTOSH [*to* SHERIFF, *who is listening intently, with his hand at his ear*]. I am afraid it's no use, my lord. The poor man's head has been turned by this ordeal.

SHERIFF [*drily*]. Yes. Just so. I am afraid, Mr MacIntosh, you also are of a gentle, trustful disposition. This man may be as you say, but other explanations are possible. But time is short ; and we need not go into that. The defender is evidently—evidently, I say, unable to give us any help. The pursuer's case rests on that of Mrs MacLean and himself. The fact that Mrs MacLean supped off sheep's-head broth along with the defender on a date of great uncertainty is no doubt of interest, but it is irrelevant. And the pursuer's evidence is also unsatisfactory. He did not see defender kill the sheep. He only heard some sounds, which he interpreted as those emitted

by a sheep in its death-agony. I am not an authority on the sounds emitted by sheep, although after listening to Mr MacColl's performance in the witness-box I feel as if, with a little further study, I might qualify as such. But one does not require to be an authority to see that Mr MacCallum may have misinterpreted the sounds he heard. I express my regret that Mr MacCallum's solicitor was not here to help him with his case. Judgment for the defender, with expenses.

[*He rises to go, and all stand, as he goes out by left back. The public file out, laughing, as they discuss the case.* MACCALLUM *strides over to* MACINTOSH.

MACCALLUM. You'll hear more about that Harris tweed before long, Mr MacIntosh.

MACINTOSH. And so will you, my friend! You won't call me a thief in a hurry again. I have two witnesses.

MACCALLUM. No, no! You *had* two witnesses. But now you've only one; for the other's nothing but a big sheep that can only say "*Baa!*"

[*He stumps out angrily, and the* COURT OFFICER *follows him, leaving* RORY *and* MACINTOSH *together alone.* MACINTOSH *takes off his gown, and stuffs his papers into his attaché case.*

MACINTOSH. Splendid, Rory! Now that they're all gone we may congratulate, I think. [*He shakes hands with* RORY.] Well, what about settling up now? No doubt as to whether you won or not, eh?

RORY. *Baa!*

MACINTOSH. That's right! Keep it up for a day or two! I'll just write you out a receipt. My fee is five guineas. [*He gets pen and paper, and writes.*] Excuse the scrawl. I want to catch the steamer. We'll say five pounds.

[*He stamps the receipt, and hands it to* RORY.

RORY [*pocketing it and making for the door*]. *Baa!*

MACINTOSH. You're priceless, old son. But hurry up, for I must get that boat.

RORY [*going out and sticking in his head through doorway, regards him with a blank face*]. *Baa!* [*He decamps.*

MACINTOSH. My five pounds! Give me back that receipt!

[*But the only reply is a distant "Baa!"* MACINTOSH *rushes to the doorway and looks after him.*

CURTAIN

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

By Stanley Houghton

CHARACTERS

Mr Ovens
Fred Ovens, *his son*
Mrs Ovens, *his second wife*
Edie, *Mrs Ovens' sister*
Dr Jellicoe
Mr Skrimshire, *a solicitor*

The scene is the parlour in the house of Mr Ovens.

This play was produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, on September 26, 1910, with the following cast:

Mr Ovens	Herbert Lomas
Fred Ovens	Milton Rosmer
Mrs Ovens	Muriel Pratt
Edie	Isobel Roland
Dr Jellicoe	Edward Landor
Mr Skrimshire	Frank Darch

A SHORT account of the late Stanley Houghton appears in the Second Series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*, in which volume his Lancashire comedy "The Dear Departed" is printed. The following play is, in a sense, complementary to "The Dear Departed," for in the latter the hero, Abel Merryweather, is assumed to be dead, whereas in the present play the hero is assumed to be alive. In both cases the dramatic situation hinges upon a mistake. The one naturally proves to be a comedy, and the other ends on a note which is distinctly grim.

Stanley Houghton won fame with his "Hindle Wakes," but he was a master of the technique of the one-act play.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE[1]

The scene is triangular; only two walls of MR OVENS' *parlour being visible. The left-hand wall is the longer. A window with a dark blind is near the spectator and farther away is the fireplace. In the right-hand wall is the door, leading into a hall or passage. By the hearth, with its back to the spectator, is an armchair; it would be full in the light from the window if the blind were up and the sun were shining into the room. In the middle of the room is a big round table and three chairs. A sideboard is below the door; and a bureau, a sofa, and other chairs are in the room.*

The place is comfortable; the room of a hard-headed peasant come to town and fairly successful there; of a man who without any advantages of birth or assistance of friends has carved out his two or three hundred a year competence for his old age; by severe economy and lucky speculations in small things.

It is an autumn evening. The fire is low, and the incandescent gas-burner by the hearth is lighted.

MR OVENS *is sitting in the armchair with his back to the spectator. His face is not visible, but one can see his whitish-grey hair and his bent back.* EDIE *and* MRS

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

OVENS *are sitting on opposite sides of the table, finishing a supper of bread and cheese and coffee.* MRS OVENS *is a hard, vigorous, capable woman of thirty-five;* EDIE *a rather pleasant girl of twenty-three.*

EDIE. Won't *he* have any supper? [*Nodding at* MR OVENS.]

MRS OVENS. He? [*Jerking her head towards* MR OVENS] No; he had his bread and milk at six o'clock. I shan't give him any more before he goes to bed.

EDIE [*glancing at clock*]. It's half-past eight now.

MRS OVENS. He doesn't eat much. Slops and things of that sort. I have to feed him like a baby; he makes such a mess of his clothes if I don't. [*Looking into the coffee jug*] Will you have a drop more coffee? There's only enough for one.

EDIE. No, I don't care about it.

MRS OVENS. Then I'll finish it. [*She pours out the coffee.*] I'd have fancied an onion with my cheese to-night, but Mr Skrimshire's coming in to see *him* [*jerking her head backwards at* MR OVENS], and they make your breath smell so.

EDIE. Mr Skrimshire; he's the solicitor that lives up at Bank Top?

MRS OVENS. Yes. *He* [*jerk of head*] used to take all his bits of business to Skrimshire's office in Salchester; and since he's so ill now and can't get up to town, young Mr Skrimshire said he'd look in and see him to-night.

EDIE. What does he want to see Mr Skrimshire for?

MRS OVENS [*smiling mysteriously*]. Ah, aha.

EDIE. Can *he* hear us?

MRS OVENS. Hear us? No fear. He's so deaf that he'd sit there as quiet as a mouse if the world was coming to an end and the last trump sounding.

EDIE [*coaxing*]. Then tell me.

MRS OVENS [*with a backward jerk*]. He's going to alter his will, at last.

EDIE. My word! Going to cut Fred out?

MRS OVENS [*compressing her lips*]. That I can't say.

EDIE. Is he going to leave everything to you?

MRS OVENS. Nor that either. But if he did wouldn't I have deserved it?

EDIE. He's been a lot of trouble to you these five years.

MRS OVENS. Trouble! You may well say that. Let alone my marrying him when I was only thirty, and I might easy have found some young fellow who'd have been glad to ask me.

EDIE. I said at the time you were daft; and he a widower with a son older than yourself.

MRS OVENS. He was sixty-six when I married him; he's seventy-one now. He'll not last much longer, and I'm only thirty-five.

EDIE. I never thought to see him pull through that last attack. It's to be hoped he doesn't linger.

MRS OVENS. No, it would be a mercy if he were taken quickly. A mercy for him, I mean.

EDIE. And for you, too, if it comes to that.

MRS OVENS. You'd never believe the work I have with him. Dressing him, and undressing him, and getting him up and down the stairs. He won't stop in his bedroom out of the way; must be down here in his armchair. I could shake him sometimes, he's that stupid.

[*There's a knock at the front door.*

MRS OVENS. Go and see who it is, Edie. It's too early for Mr Skrimshire yet, surely. Perhaps it's the doctor; he's not been to-day.

[EDIE *goes out.* MRS OVENS *rises and goes to hearth.* [*To* MR OVENS, *loudly*] Are you quite warm enough? [MR OVENS *does not reply.*] You'll have to wake up when Mr

Skrimshire comes. [*Grumbling to herself*] I don't know why you can't stop in bed; you do nothing but sleep down here. [EDIE *runs in rather scared.*

EDIE. Annie, it's Fred!

MRS OVENS. Fred?

EDIE. Fred Ovens. His son!

MRS OVENS. What does he want?

[FRED OVENS *follows* EDIE *into the room. He is a tall, well-built, heavy man of thirty-six. He is awkward and sullen, almost brutish; but also rather a striking, handsome man in a clumsy way. He has a moustache; and wears rough country clothes, very shabby, but almost picturesque. A coloured muffler is round his neck, and he carries a cap.*

FRED. That's a fine way to welcome a fellow when he comes home.

MRS OVENS. This isn't your home.

FRED. I want to have a word with you, Annie. You'll excuse me calling you Annie; I never could bring myself to call you "Mother."

MRS OVENS. You can call me what you please so long as you take yourself away from here.

FRED [*seeing* MR OVENS]. Ay; there he is.

MRS OVENS. He doesn't want to see you.

FRED. I reckon I don't want to see him, either. Last time I came he banged the front door in my face.

MRS OVENS. Small wonder, either, seeing you came straight from gaol, without even waiting for your hair to grow. He told you never to let him see you again.

FRED. You're as fond of me as ever, Annie.

MRS OVENS. Now look here, Fred Ovens. I'm boss here. If you don't get out of this house in two minutes I'll send Edie for the police.

FRED. Damn it; you'll give me something to eat.

MRS OVENS. I will not.

FRED. I'm starving. I've not eaten a bit since yesterday.

MRS OVENS. That's no affair of mine.

EDIE. Give him something to eat, Annie.

MRS OVENS. No.

EDIE. He's hungry. He'll go away quiet after. [MRS OVENS *hesitates.*] There's some bread and cheese here. Do, now.

MRS OVENS [*relenting*]. You can have a bite of bread and cheese.

FRED [*sarcastically polite*]. Thank you, Annie.

EDIE. Can I get him some beer?

MRS OVENS [*grudgingly*]. If you like.

FRED. That's good of you, Edie. I always knew my old father chose the wrong one when he married Annie.

[EDIE *goes out for the beer.* FRED *sits in the chair on the right of the table.*

MRS OVENS [*sitting on the left of the table*]. Mind, you get outside this house as soon as you've finished.

FRED [*eating*]. You talk to me so like my father that I think I'll have to call you "Mother" in future.

MRS OVENS. Don't let me have any of your lip. And just keep quiet or you'll wake your father, and then there'll be a fine row. He'd never forgive me for letting you come in here. [EDIE *returns with a jug of beer and a glass.*

FRED. Thank you, my dear. [*He pours out beer.*] Good health, Father. [*He drinks.*] I hear *he's* not been so well lately.

MRS OVENS. He's never been the same since you came and told him you'd been in gaol, and he turned you out. He had a stroke that night.

FRED. Ah!

MRS OVENS. We thought his mind was clean broken down for a time. He couldn't speak properly, or attend

to be business. Indeed, he's only just getting right upon me.

FRED. It's lucky he's got such a good, kind wife to look after him.

MRS EVANS. Be sharp with that, now, and clear out.

[She rises.

FRED. Before I clear out there's something else I want you to do for me.

MRS EVANS. What's that? [more smiles.] You'll get nothing else, I promise you.

FRED. You'll give me some money, won't you?

MRS EVANS. Not a penny.

FRED. Come—Mother.

MRS EVANS. Not a penny, I say. We've no money to give away here.

FRED. Lend me some, then.

MRS EVANS. Lend us!

FRED. I'll pay you back.

MRS EVANS. You'll never be able to pay anything back.

FRED. Some time. When he'll grow. [Nodding at MRS EVANS.]

MRS EVANS [grimly smiling]. I don't think so.

[FRED looks at her in silence, and pushes his plate away.

FRED. What? Has he cut me off, then?

MRS EVANS. What do you deserve?

FRED. Isn't he going to leave me anything?

MRS EVANS. I don't know what he'll done.

FRED [angrily]. Has he altered his will? [He rises.

MRS EVANS [alarmed]. Sit down. No, he's not altered his will.

FRED [relieved, and sitting down again]. Ah! Then there will be something. He divided it all between you and me; the money and the houses.

MRS. GREEN. I believe so, too.

MRS. HOPE. Look here. [She leans back on his chair and pulls out his empty pockets.] There's all I've got in the world. If you'll lend me your gun I'll not trouble you again for a long time.

MRS. GREEN. Why don't you earn your living?

MRS. H. I've tried.

MRS. GREEN. I don't believe it. Jim didn't want to work.

MRS. H. I'm not so easy to get work as you may think.

MRS. GREEN. Where have you been trying?

MRS. H. In Kalamazoo.

MRS. GREEN. You've been at those meetings of the unemployed?

MRS. H. Yes, I've done a deal of talking at them.

MRS. GREEN. I thought so; that's about all you're fit for. Have you your gun?

MRS. H. [Leaning back on the chair, left.] I've lent it.

MRS. GREEN. Then you'd better be going.

MRS. H. You're mighty free with your company. Mistaken, I suppose, I said I wouldn't go?

MRS. GREEN. I'd have you remember me. I'm master in this house.

MRS. H. [Nodding to the mantel.] What about that? I thought he was master.

MRS. GREEN. You thought wrong there. But you can make use of it now the end are what they are.

MRS. H. I never value luck, [Rising, and walking round to the mantel.] but I'll have a good ballast to me.

MRS. GREEN. You've been a good one to him, haven't you?

MRS. H. [Her hand on it.] You turned me out of house when I needed help; you have me. Well, I don't owe you, neither.

MRS. GREEN. But you going?

FRED. I'm going. [*He moves towards the door.*] Give me some money.

MRS OVENS. Not a farthing.

[*There is a knock at the front door.* EDIE *goes out.*

MRS OVENS. Drat it, there's Mr Skrimshire, and me not ready for him. That's your fault.

FRED. Well, I'm going, aren't I ? Who's this coming ?

MRS OVENS. Some one to see your father on business.

[EDIE *reappears.*

EDIE. Mr Skrimshire's come, Annie.

[MR SKRIMSHIRE, *a very smartly dressed young fellow of about twenty-seven, comes in briskly. He is the son and junior partner of old* SKRIMSHIRE, MR OVENS' *solicitor.*

MR SKRIMSHIRE. Good evening, Mrs Ovens.

MRS OVENS. Good evening, Mr Skrimshire.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. My father's getting on, you know, and he doesn't like turning out again after he gets home from town ; and since Mr Ovens is too ill to come to the office, my father thought he wouldn't mind giving *me* his instructions.

MRS OVENS. Oh, certainly, Mr Skrimshire. I'll make room for you here. [*She moves the things from a corner of the table and puts a chair for* MR SKRIMSHIRE *facing the spectator.*]

MR SKRIMSHIRE [*looking at* MR OVENS]. The old gentleman's having a doze, I see. Pity to waken him up. [*He sits.*] Thank you.

MRS OVENS. It'll do him good. He's dozing all day long. [*To* FRED, *who is near the door*] What are you waiting for ?

MR SKRIMSHIRE [*turning round*]. Hello ; you're Fred Ovens, aren't you ?

FRED. Yes, sir.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. I've not seen you about the village for a good while. Have you been away ?

FRED. Yes.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. What are you doing now ?

FRED. I'm not doing anything just now, sir.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. Ah, out of work, eh ? I'm sorry.

FRED. Have you come here to cut me out of his will ?

[*Nodding at* MR OVENS.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. Have I come here to—my dear man, what are you talking about ?

FRED. You've come to alter his will.

MR SKRIMSHIRE [*shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows at* MRS OVENS]. Mrs Ovens, er—your husband wants to see me alone, doesn't he ?

FRED [*to* MRS OVENS]. Tell me if he's come to alter my father's will.

MRS OVENS. Yes, he has.

MR SKRIMSHIRE [*protesting*]. Really !

FRED. Is he going to cut me out ? [*To* MR SKRIMSHIRE] Are you going to cut me out ?

MR SKRIMSHIRE. Don't make a fool of yourself, Ovens. Since Mrs Ovens has told you, I don't mind saying that I've come here to take your father's instructions for a fresh will. He may be going to cut you out, as you call it, for all I know. On the other hand, he may be going to leave you everything ; or again, he may be going to leave everything to the Archbishop of Canterbury. I haven't the least idea what he's going to do, and if I had I shouldn't tell you.

FRED [*going up to* MR OVENS]. You old devil ; you're going to cut me out, are you ? [*He shakes his fist at him.*] Curse you !

MRS OVENS [*seizing* FRED]. You leave him alone.

MR SKRIMSHIRE [*rising*]. Mrs Ovens, unless I can see your

husband alone it is really no use my wasting my time here.

[*He replaces some papers in his pocket.*

[*There is a knock at the front door.* EDIE *runs out.*

FRED [*turning to* MR SKRIMSHIRE]. All right, Mr Skrimshire, you don't need to disturb yourself. I'm going.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. That's right, Ovens. I'm glad you're not going to be stupid. Look here; come and see me at the office some day next week, and I'll see if I can find you a job.

FRED. That's good of you. Why do you make an offer like that to me?

MR SKRIMSHIRE. You may be a client of ours some day.

[EDIE *shows in* DR JELLICOE, *a jolly, stout medical man of about forty.*

DR JELLICOE. Good evening, Mrs Ovens. [*He looks at* FRED, *but doesn't know him. He speaks to* MR SKRIMSHIRE.] Hello, Jimmy, what are you doing here? [*Without waiting for an answer*] I'm disgracefully late, aren't I? I was called away to Wraysford to young Mrs Amore. An urgent case, but it turned out all right, I'm happy to say. A fine boy. That's why I'm so late. Can't be helped. These things happen in the best-regulated families, don't they?

MRS OVENS. Well, doctor, where should we be if they didn't?

DR JELLICOE. Quite so, quite so. And how's the patient?

MRS OVENS. Not been so well to-day, doctor.

DR JELLICOE. Asleep, I see. I'll just have a look at him. Won't keep you a minute, Skrimshire.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. Don't hurry on my account, old chap.

[DR JELLICOE *walks round in front of the table and approaches* MR OVENS *from the back.*

DR JELLICOE [*very loudly*]. Good evening, Mr Ovens.

[*He taps his shoulder gently.*] Wake up, sir, and let me have a look at you.

[DR JELLICOE *takes another step and turns, facing the spectator, to look* MR OVENS *in the face. Hardly has he glanced at* MR OVENS *than his own face changes in an instant, and assumes an expression of horror and surprise. He starts back.*

DR JELLICOE [*in a very different tone*]. How long has he been like this? [*They are all startled by the doctor's tone.*

MRS OVENS. Like—like what, doctor?

[*Without replying,* DR JELLICOE *takes* MR OVENS' *wrist, feels the pulse, and lets the hand drop again on the knee. He places his hand on the heart. Then he straightens up and looks at the others.*

MRS OVENS. Doctor, what is it?

DR JELLICOE [*quietly*]. Mr Ovens is dead.

[*They all stare at the doctor, spellbound.*

FRED [*in a low, deep voice*]. Dead!

MR SKRIMSHIRE [*in a whisper*]. Good gracious!

[*A slight pause.* MRS OVENS *gives a low wail, and sinking into the chair left of the table breaks into a painful storm of sobs. She quickly subsides into a gentler subdued weeping, with her head buried in her arms.* EDIE *comforts her.* FRED *sits down on a chair near the door, stunned.* MR SKRIMSHIRE *gently crosses and looks at* MR OVENS, *and stands by the doctor.*

MR SKRIMSHIRE. This is really an awful business, Jellicoe.

DR JELLICOE. He must have been dead two or three hours.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. Really! What an extraordinary thing. Will there have to be an inquest?

DR JELLICOE. No, I've been attending him. I expected something of the sort would happen.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. It's a bit of a shock, all the same. It's made me feel quite queer.

DR JELLICOE. I suppose you've nothing more to do here, now ?

MR SKRIMSHIRE. No; at least, I'd better have a word with young Ovens, and see if there's anything I can do.

DR JELLICOE. I've one more call to make. [*Looking at his watch*] Come round and have a bit of supper and a game of billiards when you've finished here.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. I will. Thanks very much.

[MR SKRIMSHIRE *returns to the table and studies some papers.*

DR JELLICOE [*touching* MRS OVENS *on the shoulder*]. Come, come, you mustn't give way like this. We've been expecting it, you know, we've been expecting it.

MRS OVENS [*tearfully*]. Yes.

DR JELLICOE. I should get him on to a couch, or a bed, or something like that, so that all the necessary arrangements can be made. Er—you know whom to send for ?

MRS OVENS [*shaking her head*]. No.

DR JELLICOE. I'll leave an address. A very decent woman.

[*He writes an address on the back of an envelope and puts it on the table.*

MRS OVENS [*looking round at the figure of* MR OVENS]. Edie, get something—something to put over him.

[EDIE *goes out.*

DR JELLICOE. Well now, there you are. I'll call round again in the morning and see you. First thing. Good-bye, my dear Mrs Ovens; good-bye. I'm very sorry. [*As he passes* MR SKRIMSHIRE] Don't be long.

[DR JELLICOE *goes out.*

MR SKRIMSHIRE [*gently to* FRED]. Er—Mr Ovens.

FRED [*rising*]. Sir? [*Coming to the table and sitting in the right chair*] This makes a difference, sir?

MR SKRIMSHIRE. The old will is valid, of course; the will he intended to supersede.

[MRS OVENS *sits up and listens to the conversation.*

You are both acquainted with its provisions, I understand?

FRED. I know he divided everything between her and me.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. That was it, roughly. And nothing fairer could have been arranged, in my opinion.

[EDIE *comes in with a white sheet. She gently places this over the body of* MR OVENS, *so that it entirely drapes the seated figure like a shroud. They watch her in silence and then* MR SKRIMSHIRE *continues; he refers to a paper.*

He left this house and the one next door to you, Mr Ovens; the two houses in Hawthorn Lane to you, ma'am. The money invested is divided into two equal parts. Of course, yours is only for life, Mrs Ovens. On your death—or remarriage—it passes to Mr Fred here.

MRS OVENS [*with a sob*]. Yes.

MR SKRIMSHIRE. I happened to bring a note of these provisions with me, for reference in the business which, er—for which there was no occasion.

[MR SKRIMSHIRE *rises, putting away his papers.*

That is all, I think. I won't intrude any longer. Terrible business. Very sorry. [*He goes to the door.*] Er—perhaps you will look us up at the office in a day or two, Mr Ovens. We have acted for your father for a good many years, and we shall be very pleased to act for you if you wish it.

FRED. Thank you, sir. I dare say I'll call.

[EDIE *shows* MR SKRIMSHIRE *out.*

[*A pause.* MRS OVENS *looks at* FRED.

MRS OVENS. And now, perhaps *you'll* go, and leave me alone with my grief.

FRED. I don't stir from here.

MRS OVENS. It was *his* wish you shouldn't stop in this house. I'll see *that* carried out, at any rate.

FRED. You're forgetting one thing, Mother.

MRS OVENS. What's that ? [EDIE *returns.*

FRED. This is *my* house now. He left it me in his will. [MRS OVENS *sits up and stares at him.*] You're not boss here any longer. Neither is *he*. *I'm* master of the house. [MRS OVENS *rises to her feet.*] It's not me that's got to clear out; it's *you.*

MRS OVENS. Me!

EDIE. Fred, you'll not turn her out to-night ?

FRED. I will indeed.

MRS OVENS. I won't go.

FRED. If you don't go I'll put you out.

MRS OVENS. You wouldn't dare.

FRED. There's nothing I'd like better.

[MRS OVENS *hesitates a second and then breaks down.*

MRS OVENS. Oh ! I can't go to-night. To think that I was saying to Edie only just now what a worry he was, not knowing that he'd never trouble me again. [*Appealing to him*] Fred.

FRED [*implacable*]. Get your hat and coat and take yourself off.

MRS OVENS. Edie, what am I to do ?

EDIE. You'd better come home with me to-night, if he means it.

FRED. I do mean it.

[MRS OVENS *dries her eyes and gets up again.*

MRS OVENS. You're glad that he's dead. [*She goes out.*

FRED. I'm not, though he was a hard man and he treated

me harshly. I'd give a good deal if I hadn't stood there and cursed him a short while ago.

EDIE [*turning on him*]. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Fred Ovens. I never heard of such a thing. What, turn a wife out of the house when her husband's not yet cold!

FRED [*sullenly*]. She was for turning me out.

EDIE. You know what her temper is. I thought better of you, indeed I did. No Christian would do what you're doing. [MRS OVENS *returns with coat and bonnet on.* Fred, let her stay to-night. She's your father's wife, remember.

FRED. That's why I'm turning her out. [*Strolling over to* MR OVENS *and addressing him*] I'll show you who's master of the house now.

MRS OVENS. There's no need to waste words on him, Edie. I wouldn't stop in his house now if he went down on his bended knees. Come along. [EDIE *goes out.*] Good night, Fred Ovens. You're master of the house, and may you pass a pleasant night in it with the man you cursed when he sat dead in his chair. [MRS OVENS *goes out.*

[*The front door bangs.* FRED *shivers and moves to the front of the table and sits on the edge. He laughs quietly.*

FRED. Pleasant night. Why shouldn't I? [*To* MR OVENS] You won't interfere with me. I'm not afraid of you. What is there to be afraid of? [*He looks round fearfully and his eye again returns to* MR OVENS' *figure.*] You can't turn me out of doors now. I'm boss here. [*The figure does not take any notice.* FRED *shivers again.*] I'll go round to the "King's Arms" and have a drink, there'll be company there. [*To* MR OVENS *quickly*] But I'll come back for the night, mind you. You'll not drive me away. [*He goes to the gas and turns it out, leaving the room in perfect*

darkness. He gropes his way to the door. Here he pauses.] I've no money. [*He thinks.*] They always used to keep some money in the sideboard drawer. [*He gropes his way to the sideboard on the extreme right and stumbles against a chair.*] Can't see a thing, and I've no matches. Wait a minute. [*He crosses to the window and pulls up the blind. Bright moonlight strikes through the window. He crosses to the sideboard and easily finds the drawer, opens it and searches. There is no money to be found. He takes a cash-box and turns towards the window with it to examine it carefully. As he turns he comes full on the silent figure of* MR OVENS, *sitting rigid in his chair, shrouded in white, ghastly in the glare of the moon.* FRED *starts back with an oath and drops the cash-box.*] You can't frighten me. You shan't turn me out, I tell you. I'm master of the house. [*He sits on the edge of the table looking at the figure for a long space. Then he speaks in a low, strained voice.*] Don't look at me like that. Don't look at me like that! I didn't know you were dead when I cursed you. [*Another pause: he shudders and covers his face with his hands.*] God! I can't stand it.

[*He steals silently out of the room.* MR OVENS *sits in his shroud in the moonlight, master of the house. The front door is heard closing.*

THE CURTAIN DESCENDS VERY SLOWLY

FRIENDS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Herbert Farjeon

CHARACTERS

Dan Donagan, *an undertaker*
John O'Flaherty, *a doctor*
Father Murphy
Villagers

Scene. *A roadside.*

This play was first produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on November 20, 1917, with the following cast:

Dan Donagan . . . Arthur Shields
John O'Flaherty . . Peter Nolan
Father Murphy . . . Louis O'Connor
Villagers

Mr Herbert Farjeon is a well-known dramatic critic whose work has appeared in the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Herald*, and *The Weekly Westminster*, as well as in weekly and monthly periodicals. He also collaborated with Mr Horace Horsnell in the recently produced play "Advertising April."

"Friends" is a delightfully Irish comedy, and belongs to the same class as Lady Gregory's "Spreading the News" and "The Rising of the Moon." There is humour in the original situation—the mutual affection of the doctor and the undertaker which must be concealed at all costs—and if one accepts that the subsequent developments are logical and ludicrous enough. The characters are vividly revealed and the dialogue is excellent.

FRIENDS[1]

SCENE: *A road, a ditch, and a hedge. Many stars, and a full moon. The orchestrion of a merry-go-round is grinding out tunes off stage.*

DAN DONAGAN *and* JOHN O'FLAHERTY *creep on L.* JOHN *carries a lantern.*

DAN [*furtively*]. Whisht now, is there anybody coming?

JOHN. I can't see the speck of a soul. All Glengannon's away, I tell you, after potshots an' gewgaws at the fair.

DAN [*plucking at* JOHN's *sleeve*]. But Patrick is digging for his pound-piece in the field by. If he should see us!

JOHN [*shaking his arm loose*]. Psha, Patrick is blind as a bat.

DAN [*whining*]. Well, Jim an' Tansey have put up the banns, an' 'tis a fine dry night for courting.

JOHN. Jim an' Tansey will be at the fair, I tell you, gasping words of passion in the swingboats.

DAN. Well, if Tom Brady should be visiting his sick aunt, an' miss his way, an' strike this part by mistake, an' find us together?

JOHN. How would Tom Brady miss his way, and his aunt in no sickness at all, and he never visiting her when she is or is not?

DAN. Arrah, Johnnie, I don't like the risk, I do *not* like it.

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28-30 West 38th Street, New York.

What would I do, the dead men all to be going to Shamus Morgan? 'Tis little enough the undertaking brings me now, an' me no hand at these devil's own new-fangled cremations.

JOHN. 'Tis little enough the doctoring brings me either, and all Glengannon in the blasted bloom of health. But what I say to Sarah is the good sense—the less you have, the less you have to lose. So let you be sitting down now under this bit of bush an' playing aces under the moon with no fuss at all.

[*Sitting down with back to hedge, and producing an old pack of cards.*

DAN. Sure, it isn't telling herself you are the way our friendship would shame the love of Jonathan an' David into a nod and a look?

JOHN. How would I be letting out our secret to a pack of blabbing women? Settle on the grass now, an' give over shaking.

DAN [*sitting*]. Keep wary then, if anybody should come the way you're looking, while I watch down the road from Ballymagh. An' let us make a plan, if they should spring on us by surprise, to be kicking an' scratching an' tearing at one another's flesh. [*They play cards.*

JOHN. That is a good plan, and it's call you names I will they wouldn't print in a private paper. Ah, Dannie dear, isn't it a pleasant thing to be playing here like lovers on the sly and not a soul to blame us for our friendship? And isn't it a strange thing, the like of which I never heard, us to be enemies by day an' scowling in the open, an' friends by night an' slinking to each other's houses under the stars like thieves before the poliss?

[FATHER MURPHY *enters R. They do not see him.*

DAN. Faith, Johnnie darling, 'tis sad it makes me, surely, the way we can't be with each other all times. An' 'tis

sadder still it makes me the way I must be saying hard sayings of you behind your back, an' talking distant talk to you with others by.

JOHN. Ah, Dannie, Dannie, I'd give herself an' seven pounds things to be the way they were before we let on to have quarrelled.

DAN. And I would give one-half or one-third of all I have, which is little enough, God knows.

JOHN. It is better to be with you, Dannie, than digging up five-pound notes by the spadeful in Australy, the way I'd come strolling home in golden boots and a diamond tail-coat.

DAN. And it is better to be with you, Johnnie, than to wake up an' find a choir of angels round my bed coaxing and wheedling me to lend a hand in heaven.

FATHER MURPHY [*regarding them objectively*]. Well, well, 'tis the quare world, surely!

[*At the sound of his voice* JOHN *seizes* DAN *by the hair and begins shaking him.*

DAN. Leave go my hair, you divil's rat you, or I'll bite the heart out of you!

JOHN [*with simulated fury*]. How dare you be saying 'tis an ill doctor I am? How dare you be saying Denis Harn would never have come by his eternal glory if I hadn't been drinking quart-pots at the Golden Harp? Take that, you dirty little rascal, an' may the Lord put a twist on your tongue till you can speak the truth only!

DAN. I'll scratch your eyes out!

FATHER MURPHY [*undisturbed*]. Whisht now, stop your play-acting. Have I not heard you with my own ears swearing loving oaths under the bush there and telling your hate to be a sham only?

DAN [*giving up the game and blabbering with fear*]. Oh, Father Murphy, Father Murphy, you won't tell on us, for the love of Christ you won't tell the neighbours us not to

be the biggest breathing enemies in Glengannon? [*To* JOHN, *whiningly*] Didn't I say 'twas a risk, Johnnie, did I *not* say it, us to be talking an' playing in the open?

FATHER MURPHY. Listen to me now. I am not the man to judge his fellow-creatures by their deeds, and I do not blame you two for loving one another the way all good Christian souls should love one another to the Judgment Day. But tell me how it is you have fallen into the unholy slough of deceit, and maybe I'll not let on at all. Do you not despise one another now?

JOHN [*gruffly*]. We do not.

FATHER MURPHY. Then why do you make a sham before all Glengannon to be the biggest haters next God and the devil?

DAN [*under his breath to* JOHN]. Be wary, John, he has made no promise, and he the biggest bibble-babbler in all Glengannon.

JOHN [*to* DAN]. Hold your tongue, Dan, the cat is out now. We've nothing left but put our trust in God and not ruffle him. [*Aloud*] You see, Father, 'tis not a good policy, a doctor and an undertaker to be hail fellow and well met with one another.

FATHER MURPHY. And why not?

JOHN. Ah, you'd know that if you were in our calling. In the old days Dannie and I were never apart, but there came a bad spell of sickness in the town, an' they called it an ill sign the doctor an' the undertaker to be so thick, an' put it about me to be letting folk out of the world for the sake of Dan here.

FATHER MURPHY. I never heard tell of that before.

DAN. Ah, 'twas before you came to Glengannon, Dan and I made up to have a mighty fuss an' split apart, the way we might recover our custom. An' that's twenty years by, and we all that time meeting in the dark, an' visiting one

another in the dead of night, and writing to one another in sly writings, an' snapping at one another on the green with loving words.

DAN [*beseechingly*]. Ah, Father, you won't tell, you will *not* tell now!

FATHER MURPHY. How do I know it isn't the truth they were saying, and John here doesn't go killing off his patients like flies upon the window-pane?

DAN [*snivelling*]. How do you know, is it? May I drive my own coffin if there's as much as a blessed microbe died since October last!

JOHN. An' may I write my own death-certificate if there's a man, woman, or child had so much as the sneezes since November!

FATHER MURPHY. Well, well, that's true, that's true.

DAN [*cajolingly*]. Ah, 'tis a good man you are, Father, a good man, surely, and if I'm taken first it's a dazzling word I'll put in for you with the Lord in heaven. You'll not tell now, will you?

FATHER MURPHY. 'Tis an unwise thing to be making promises, Dan Donagan.

DAN. 'Tis unwise to be making promises any time, surely, and I'm the last would ask such a foolish thing of a sage man like you. But do you think you'll tell? It would be no promise now to be saying you don't *think* you'll tell.

FATHER MURPHY. Mind this, Dan, a good man never came to harm yet, telling or no telling.

DAN. 'Tis the good sense you are talking, dear Father; a good man never came to harm yet, surely. But do you think me a good man? Say you think me a good man, an' then I'll know you'll not tell.

FATHER MURPHY [*disregarding him*]. Well, I'll be getting along now, but maybe I'll see you again before the night is out. [*Going.*

JOHN [*jumping up and catching him by the arm*]. Why are you stepping that way, Father? 'Tis not that way will bring you to your house at all.

FATHER MURPHY. Maybe it is not going to my house I am.

JOHN. But it's that way leads to the fair only.

DAN. 'Tis a dark night, surely. A blind man might miss his way the like of this night.

FATHER MURPHY. 'Tis not missing any way I am, Dan Donagan, for it is to the fair itself I am going.

JOHN. Arrah, what would you be doing among the rogues an' gipsies, and you a holy man?

FATHER MURPHY. What would I be doing among the rogues and gipsies? Well, well, we'll see, we'll see.

[*Exit R.*

DAN [*blabbering*]. He'll tell, he'll tell! He'll spread it, as sure as I've made my last box. Do you think he'll tell now?

JOHN [*disturbed*]. I don't know, I don't know.

DAN [*urgently*]. Of course, you don't *know*, but do you think he'll tell now?

JOHN. Well then, it wouldn't give me the staggers.

DAN [*in a bad way*]. Arrah, I'm destroyed entirely. Did I not tell you it was a risk to be playing here in the broad night, and you saying not a flea in Glengannon but was picking off cokernuts at the fair?

JOHN. It can't be helped now. It is not your whining will save ourselves. Come, come, Dan, let us put our two heads together an' think what's best to be done.

DAN [*shrill and despairing*]. Arrah, 'tis your fault entirely! Was it not the way you were facing that Father Murphy came? Why must you be so smitten with your kings an' queens not to keep a better look-out?

JOHN [*roughly*]. 'Tis no use whining, I tell you!

DAN. 'Tis lost we are, surely! And why did you blurt

out the whole tale with a tongue would put shame on a jabbering magpie?

JOHN. That'll do now!

DAN. Do, will it?

JOHN. What use would it be to lie at all, and he listening to our talk behind our backs?

DAN. What use would it be not to lie, and he a gossip would clack out tittle-tattle to the Lord Himself?

JOHN [*with contempt*]. Psha, 'tis a weak and wobbly kind of a man you are, Dan Donagan; I've known that a long time past.

DAN. Wobbly, is it? If you could keep your tongue from wobbling, it's prosperous men we'd be this hour, and not twisting in the grip of ruin.

JOHN. Keep my tongue from wobbling, is it? It's many a time I've kept my tongue from saying to you what my mind knew well an' better in the days gone by.

DAN. What did your mind know, John O'Flaherty; what did your slippery, scabby little mind know? Can't you speak out like a decent man now, and not go crawling up back-ways in your talk?

JOHN. What did my mind know, is it? 'Tis a sly way you have with the cards, Dan Donagan, an' 'tis a bad penny you paid me with the first time ever you lost.

DAN. 'Twas the same bad penny you paid me with the time before, and have been paying me with these twenty years.

JOHN [*menacingly*]. Is it a swindler I am?

DAN [*a little cowed*]. Maybe you are an' maybe you are not.

JOHN. Is it a swindler I am? Who is it is crawling up back-ways in his talk this moment?

DAN. 'Tis only following you I am up the filthy reeking places.

JOHN. Is it a swindler I am? Speak now!

DAN. Is it wanting me to say the *word* you are? Because I'll not say it—but I'll think what I choose!

JOHN. Then I'll ask you, Dan Donagan, who was it tore the corner off the ace of spades for a keepsake?

DAN. And is it an underhand thing the like of that you've been doing all these years, not letting on you knew and me thinking you as innocent as the babe new-born? Is that honest play now, you to know we both knew, an' me only knowing I knew myself?

JOHN. 'Twill be a bad day for you the day you send for me in sickness, and it no more than a pin-scratch.

DAN. And a worse day for you the day I drive you to the cemetery. A wild, galloping, hedge-an'-ditch funeral it will be.

JOHN. It is a cheat and a coward you are, Dan Donagan, and a dirty man would soil the fingers of the devil himself. I wouldn't spoil my spit on you.

DAN. What is that you are saying?

JOHN. It is a cheat and a coward you are, and a man of no marrow at all.

DAN. If you were to say that to my old father I would knock you down on the spot.

JOHN. What is that you would do on the spot now?

DAN. I know what I would do!

JOHN. Is it knock me down you would?

DAN. It is then!

[*They fight. Enter* FATHER MURPHY *and some* VILLAGERS, *R., from the fair with lanterns.*

FATHER MURPHY. There they are. Well, well, the simple fellows! If they aren't trying to trick us with their fighting again!

DAN [*struggling*]. I'll give you one for that!

JOHN [*struggling*]. Let go my hair, or I'll knead you to a paste!

FIRST VILLAGER. Give over shamming now. Father Murphy has told us your device. 'Tis no good making faces at one another from this out.

JOHN [*to* DAN]. Kick, would you?

SECOND VILLAGER. Come, come, John O'Flaherty, you've made fools of us for twenty years, but that's done. Get off his chest now.

JOHN [*violently*]. Swindler am I?

FATHER MURPHY. Drag them apart, some of you.

[*The* VILLAGERS *separate them and stand in two opposing groups, holding them by the arms.*

JOHN [*trying to free himself*]. Let me go, let me go. I've not begun on him yet.

DAN [*trying to free himself*]. I'll pay you out for this.

SECOND VILLAGER. 'Tis little wonder they took us in. They'd make their fortunes play-acting.

JOHN. It's none of your business, James Brady, if I've a mind to smash a man. Let me go, I tell you.

FATHER MURPHY. That'll do now. All Glengannon knows Damon and Pythias no faster friends than yourselves.

DAN. Me friends with that cheat!

FATHER MURPHY. Come, come, I tell you all Glengannon knows your secret. I told them at the fair.

DAN. Ah, I knew it was to go blabbing you left us!

FATHER MURPHY. Yes, Dan, it was to go blabbing, as you say. But I bore no ill-will against you. I had a mind to help you both.

DAN. Psha, how would it help, telling out our secret to the whole town?

FIRST VILLAGER. There, Dan, you've confessed yourself now. 'Tis no good any longer you an' John making a pretence to have quarrelled.

JOHN. But we have quarrelled, I tell you—we've quarrelled

since Father Murphy left. He called me a blabber and a swindler.

SECOND VILLAGER. Well, if that isn't the shabbiest make-up ever two men invented!

THIRD VILLAGER. It's not a yarn the like of that yarn will take us in again, John O'Flaherty.

JOHN. We *have* quarrelled, I tell you.

DAN [*still struggling*]. Swindler!

FIRST VILLAGER. It's no good, Dannie. The game's up.

FATHER MURPHY. Listen to me now. I told you I wanted to help you, and I have helped you. When the folk heard of the long years you'd lain in hiding with your love, and when I reminded them there hadn't been a death or a sickness since November last, it's honest men they named you, and you all that time with a grander chance than ever of playing into the hands of heaven on the sly.

FIRST VILLAGER. So we will let all go by, Dan an' John, an' bear no grudge, an' 'twill be a mighty pleasure to us, after the wrong we did you, to see you two walking an' playing an' drinking together all the days of your life.

DAN. Me walk about with that spawn!

JOHN. Me drink with that rib of Satan!

SECOND VILLAGER. Psha, 'tis beyond a joke. What kind of a fool do they take us for? 'Tis an insult, I declare.

THIRD VILLAGER. 'Tis no good talking to them, surely. If you'd rather go on shamming than have my sicknesses, John O'Flaherty, and if *you'd* rather go on shamming than have my corpsing, Dan Donagan, do so, and it's others I'll find for the jobs.

FATHER MURPHY. 'Tis a foolish thing to make a pretence to be enemies now, and you fast friends.

DAN. 'Tis a foolisher thing to make a pretence to be friends and us fast enemies.

FATHER MURPHY. Come, come, don't you see by keeping

up that game you'll only turn the folk against you? It saved your practices in the days gone by, but 'twill only ruin them now. If you want the doctoring and the burying you must give over shamming.

JOHN [*under his breath to* DAN]. 'Tis the only thing for us, Dan Donagan. Father Murphy is right. 'Tis you or starvation!

DAN [*to* JOHN]. That's the first true word ever I heard you speak, John O'Flaherty. You or starvation it is!

JOHN. Well, you it must be, though it's a speck of mildew you are!

DAN. And you it must be, though the hogs themselves'd leave you for the wash.

FATHER MURPHY. Come to sense now, and take one another by the hand—[*he joins their hands*]—and bless one another in the great piece of luck that has fallen on you.

JOHN [*aloud*]. God bless you, Danny. [*Aside*] Damn you!

DAN [*aside*]. Damn you, Johnny. [*Aloud*] God bless you.

FATHER MURPHY. That's right, that's right. Isn't it the pleasing sight to see them united again before us after these many years?

FIRST VILLAGER. It is so. A power of happiness to you both from this on!

SECOND VILLAGER. 'Tis dancing an' singing we'll have this night at the fair, with John an' Dan together on a throne to watch the boys an' girls in a fling of joy.

THIRD VILLAGER. We will that. An' they shall toast one another at my expense in the sight of all.

FATHER MURPHY. And now, you two, walk before arm in arm, and lead the way back to the fair, where all Glengannon is waiting to greet you with mighty cheers. Line up two and two behind them, boys, and away we go! Quick march!

[*The procession begins to move off R. The orchestrion strikes up again.*

DAN. Merciful powers, don't squeeze my arm so tight!

JOHN. 'Tis the affection I bear you makes me do it, Danny dear. Stop shoving me into the bramble-bushes, now!

DAN. Arrah, I can't get close enough to you for love, Johnnie darling.

[*They go off. The* VILLAGERS *follow, cheering.*

FATHER MURPHY [*looking up at the stars*]. Well, well, 'tis a good night for a good work, and 'tis a good thought to think that two fast friends the like of Dan Donagan and John O'Flaherty will always be in the one place together from this out.

CURTAIN

MIMI

From "Scènes de la Vie de Bohème"

By Olive Conway

CHARACTERS

Rodolphe, *a poet*
Marcel, *a painter*
Blancheron, *a sugar-refiner*
Mimi, Musette, Phémie } *grisettes*

Paris, 1845. *A work-girl's room in the Latin Quarter.*

"The *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*," says Arthur Symons, "sum up an epoch, give us the map of a country: it is the Bohemia of the Latin Quarter as it existed at the Romantic epoch . . . the gayest and most melancholy country in the world. . . . Murger writes of a life which is itself a tragic comedy in fancy dress, a life wholly in exaggeration. No one is quite sincere in Bohemia, because sincerity is a respectable virtue."

Puccini's opera *La Bohème* has, more than the original book, familiarized the world with Mimi and her companions of the Bohemian life. In Miss Conway's play, which is taken from her volume of *Costume Plays*,[1] two episodes of Bohemia are telescoped to illustrate the love of Rodolphe and Mimi, and their life with its own philosophy, "a laughing kind of Stoicism," gay, hapless, irresponsible, eternally youthful.

[1] French, 2*s*. 6*d*.

MIMI[1]

The room in the Latin Quarter of MIMI *and* MUSETTE, *young girls who are flower-makers. Window, C., admits to small balcony, bounded by a hand-rail. Table, chairs; bed, which would probably be exposed to view, but may be unseen behind a curtaining. Door L. Fireplace R.*

MUSETTE *sits at table at work on artificial flowers. Enter* MIMI, *hatless, with shawl over her shoulders.*

MUSETTE [*picking up envelope from table*]. A letter.

MIMI. For me? From Rodolphe?

MUSETTE. Not unless Monsieur Rodolphe has been ennobled. [*Gives the letter.*

MIMI. Oh, from one of those gentlemen. They write fine letters, those aristocrats. They offer to throw the world at my adorable feet.

MUSETTE. You know the inside of a letter without the inconvenience of opening it?

MIMI. This is not my day for opening a letter with a decorated envelope. This is only the third day.

MUSETTE. The third day?

MIMI. The third day that Rodolphe has not been near me. [*Puts letter on mantel.*] On the sixth day I may open the letter of Monsieur le Vicomte or Monsieur le Marquis or Monsieur the rich man who makes me the rich

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

man's offer. Oh, Musette, Musette, never fall in love with a poet.

MUSETTE. I fell in love with a painter. Is there so much to choose between a painter and a poet? Neither is able to make us the rich man's offer.

MIMI. Who wants that offer? But your painter is visible. You see Marcel. But Rodolphe? Is he out? No. The porter assures me each day that he has not gone out. In his room up there [*points to ceiling*], swearing when he sees me that he loves me, and staying in his room so that he does not see me.

MUSETTE. It is without doubt an epic which detains him.

MIMI. I am his epic. I! [*Goes to letter, then replaces it.*] No: he can stay six days with his Muse, but one day longer and I—— Oh!

RODOLPHE [*off C.*]. Never was I trained to be a mountaineer.

MIMI [*to window*]. Rodolphe! Oh, be careful.

[*She looks up as if he is climbing down.*

RODOLPHE [*off*]. It is necessity, and Mimi is the name of my necessity.

MIMI [*with relief*]. Oh, you are safe.

[RODOLPHE *enters by balcony—a young poet, strangely dressed in baggy check trousers and, for the rest, in a turban and a bright Turkish cloak of a comic-opera absurdity.*

But you——

RODOLPHE. Behold me! Witness the depth of my humiliation. Realize the desperation which drove me to you in the garments of an Oriental from an opera.

MUSETTE. I don't realize anything. You invade our room.

MIMI. That is true. You have the conduct as well as the costume of a Turk.

RODOLPHE. But I am without cigarettes.

MIMI. Cigarettes! Was it for that you—— ?

RODOLPHE [*drawing her to window*]. See! On that gilded balcony a dandy smokes a Havana. Look up. On the floor above an artist wafts a fragrant mist from a pipe with an amber mouthpiece. See below, those workmen with their cutty-pipes. There is nobody who does not smoke, save I and my uncle's chimneys.

MUSETTE. The chimneys of your uncle? What—— ?

RODOLPHE. My uncle, the man who demands of me, of a poet, a manual on chimneys. My uncle, who locks me in my room and takes away the key, and makes assurance doubly sure by abstracting my clothes and leaving me in these to prevent my going out until I have completed his execrable *Guide to Chimneys*. My uncle, the maker of stoves, who is to give me fifty francs for the work which he will sign. My uncle, who leaves me food, but forgets tobacco.

MIMI. And for an uncle, for the fifty francs of your uncle, you consented to be locked up from me; and when you come at last, is it for my sake? No: it is for tobacco.

RODOLPHE. Which you do not provide.

MIMI. Your avarice is intolerable. Fifty francs!

RODOLPHE. The landlord requires to be satisfied.

MIMI. Since when did landlords count with you? Since when did you forget the art of moving in a hurry?

RODOLPHE. Since you occupied the room below mine.

MIMI. Oh, so it is my fault? Mine! I turn you into money-grubber, I cause you to forget poetry and to write manuals on chimneys.

MUSETTE. It seems to me that monsieur has sacrificed his art for you.

MIMI. But it is not for me: it is for a landlord. He says so. He admits it.

MUSETTE. If I were to go out, I think he could make it clear to you.

RODOLPHE. I think my actions might speak louder than words.

MIMI. You shall not drive her out.

RODOLPHE. The alternative is that you and I go out. [*Takes coin from pocket.*] Fifty sous. It will not be truffles and champagne, but——

MIMI. Go out? Go out in that disguise?

RODOLPHE. I have sacrificed my art for you. For you I will also sacrifice my pride.

MIMI. And my feelings? I am to lunch, am I, with something from the wardrobe of the Odéon? I remind you that it is not carnival time, monsieur. If I am to lunch I will lunch with nothing less respectable than a black coat.

RODOLPHE. A black coat? I never owned one.

MIMI. It appears then that my lunch will not be with you.

RODOLPHE. Mimi, don't ask impossibilities.

MIMI. To love, monsieur, nothing is impossible. You climb down a balcony for a cigarette, for a bagatelle like tobacco. For love, you will not even find a black coat.

[MUSETTE *makes a cigarette.*

RODOLPHE. Are black coats to be found in a lady's room?

MIMI. To me it is nothing where you find the coat, Monsieur Ali Rodolphe.

RODOLPHE. So far, I have not even found the cigarette. It seems to me that I have risked my neck for nothing. Well, I can risk my neck again. I can go back by the ladder of death, and if I am so fortunate as to arrive I can resume my labours of a galley-slave at the manual on chimneys.

[*At window.*

MIMI. No! No!

RODOLPHE. But what is life to me?

MIMI. You have told me it is I who am all life to you.

And you would risk your life ? And why ? Because I have a caprice to lunch with you in a black coat. Caprice, monsieur ; do you deny me my caprice ? Would you forget the faith of the Quarter, renounce the goddess who controls our lives ? Caprice is queen, goddess, ruler of Bohemia—and you, a poet, would be a traitor to caprice ?

MUSETTE. In his need of tobacco he is not quite himself, Mimi.

MIMI. You have rolled him a cigarette !

RODOLPHE. You have the caprice that I do not smoke it?

MIMI. No. [*Passes it to him and lights match.*] It will assist you to discover a black coat.

[MARCEL *knocks at door.* MUSETTE *opens. The door is left open, showing the stair-landing.*

MARCEL. May I—— ? [*Sees* RODOLPHE.] Your absence is explained. You have been travelling. You return to us in the costume of——

[MARCEL'S *own coat is a short jacket of velvet which once was crimson, and is now a study in stains.*

RODOLPHE. Speaking of costumes, Marcel, have you such a thing as a black coat?

MARCEL. Are you under the impression that there has been a revolution while you've been away ? A black coat ? I don't deny that I'm a man of ambition. At thirty I may possess a black coat. I may even wear it occasionally. Black coats are the emblems of success. But at present, my dear Rodolphe, my wardrobe is as you see, and you perceive the whole of it. Such as it is, I offer you the loan of any part of it without reserve.

RODOLPHE [*takes* MARCEL'S *hand and appeals to* MIMI]. Can a friend do more than offer me his trousers ?

MIMI. Only they are not required.

RODOLPHE. She has the caprice to be taken out by me in a black coat.

MUSETTE. The demand is too reasonable to be called caprice.

RODOLPHE. Reasonable!

MUSETTE. Decidedly. To amuse your uncle you wear the costume of an Arabian night.

RODOLPHE. Do I like it?

MUSETTE. Do people like poisons? No. They take antidotes, and the antidote to the robe of Baghdad is the coat of the Rue de Rivoli.

MIMI. And love should find the way.

MARCEL. Even to the fantastic coats of those who promenade the Rue de Rivoli?

MIMI. Even to that, monsieur.

MARCEL [*taking off his coat*]. Then never shall it be said that friendship failed in the hour of need. Rodolphe, my friend, take my coat.

MIMI. But yours is not a black coat.

MARCEL. It is a coat which can be blackened. Is there no soot in the chimney of mademoiselle?

MIMI. I am to go out with a chimney-sweep?

RODOLPHE. With a poet in a black coat, according to demand, mademoiselle.

MIMI. It is an insult to the napery of the restaurant.

RODOLPHE. The napery? You do not suppose that we eat in a restaurant where they have tablecloths? Somewhere it is necessary to apply the curb of reason to the extravagance of luxurious ambition.

MIMI [*showing the letter*]. Is it? An envelope with a decoration, monsieur: an illustrious envelope which——

[RODOLPHE *snatches: she puts it behind her back.*

—an envelope which I have not opened, but one which points to the necessity on your part of providing a black coat which is not black with the grime of charcoal.

MARCEL [*resuming his coat*]. You make a harsh condition.

MIMI. I ask for faith in the goddess of the Quarter. If

she sends to me the caprice to see Rodolphe in a black coat, she will send to him the means to gratify my caprice.

MARCEL. She must be, mademoiselle, a most hardworking goddess.

[*On the landing outside, as if puffing up the stairs, there appears the black coat. It is worn by one* BLANCHERON, *a stout provincial.*

BLANCHERON [*stopping in doorway*]. Messieurs, mesdames, is it much nearer heaven that the painter, Marcel, lives?

MARCEL. Naturally at the top, monsieur, for the purpose not of economy, but of the light. But I am Marcel, if——

BLANCHERON [*still panting*]. Then permit me to state my business. My cousin, your landlord, has mentioned to me your talent as a portrait painter, and——

MUSETTE. A chair, monsieur. Please be seated.

BLANCHERON. Thank you. [*Introducing himself*] Blancheron of Nantes, sugar-refiner, formerly Mayor of Nantes, captain in the National Guard, and author of a pamphlet on sugar.

MARCEL. Honoured, monsieur.

BLANCHERON. Being about to visit the sugar plantations in the colonies, I wish to leave my family a souvenir—my portrait.

MARCEL. To be chosen by the former Mayor of Nantes is a great honour.

BLANCHERON. Consequently, the price will be low. The distinction of your sitter is in itself a reward.

MIMI. All the sitters of Monsieur Marcel have distinction, monsieur. Permit me to present to you your predecessor in his studio. [*Presents* RODOLPHE.] Monsieur le Marquis de Chatillon.

BLANCHERON [*leaps up and bows deeply*]. Monsieur.

[RODOLPHE *bows lightly.*

[*To* MARCEL] Pardon, monsieur. I made a mistake. It

was in my mind that when my cousin, your landlord, mentioned the price of a hundred francs, he was thinking of his rent.

MARCEL. I have, as a favour, done portraits for so trifling a price. Naturally, that does not include the hands.

BLANCHERON. We will exclude the hands.

MUSETTE. But, monsieur, with hands you could be seen holding your pamphlet on sugar, which would be gratifying to you. For a hundred and twenty francs Monsieur Marcel will——

MARCEL. You forget, Musette, that colours are dear at this time of the year.

BLANCHERON. It varies with the season, like sugar?

MARCEL. Exactly, and this month——

BLANCHERON. But I will not pay more than a hundred and twenty francs, with hands and my pamphlet.

RODOLPHE. Oblige the gentleman, Marcel, my good fellow, oblige him. You can paint marquises every day, but it is not always that a Mayor of Nantes is in Paris.

MARCEL. I consent, monsieur, at the solicitation of Monsieur le Marquis.

BLANCHERON [*doorwards*]. Then we——

MIMI. But your coat, monsieur.

BLANCHERON. My coat?

MIMI. Do you not know that Marcel always paints his sitters in the robe which he has adopted for artistic purposes from those worn by members of the Academy?

BLANCHERON. A robe of the Academy! Oh!

RODOLPHE. You begin to perceive, monsieur, that you will receive overflowing value for your francs.

BLANCHERON. But I hoped to be painted at once. I sail in two days, and where does one obtain this robe?

RODOLPHE [*to* MARCEL]. You have finished with me in this one?

MARCEL. Yes.

RODOLPHE. Then I am good-natured enough to offer the use of it to Monsieur the Mayor of Nantes.

BLANCHERON. Monsieur! From the shoulders of a marquis!

MIMI [*taking his coat*]. Permit me, monsieur.

RODOLPHE [*offering the robe*]. And permit me.

BLANCHERON. Oh! In the robe of the Academy, warm from the shoulders of a marquis! It is superb. In Nantes they will point at your portrait, monsieur, and they will tell this tale for ever.

MARCEL. I am at your service now if you will go upstairs.

[*Ushers him out. Exeunt* BLANCHERON *and* MARCEL.

MIMI [*closing door*]. Now have you faith in the goddess?

MUSETTE. He even left his hat.

RODOLPHE [*taking off the turban*]. That is just as well.

[*He puts on* BLANCHERON'S *coat.*

MUSETTE. And a hundred and twenty francs! Faith, Marcel should treat me well to-night——

MIMI. Yes: that is what Marcel can earn in an afternoon, while you——

RODOLPHE. I? I am in a black coat. It is true that it fits with moderation, but the cloth is of excellent quality.

[MUSETTE *sits to her flower-making.*

MIMI. So excellent that it does not appear to me to go with lunch at fifty sous for two.

RODOLPHE. Mimi, a caprice is a celibate.

MIMI. Is what?

RODOLPHE. You can say what you like about caprices, but they shouldn't have families. You are not, for example, going to decline to go out with me now that I have procured a black coat?

MIMI. I thought I procured it.

RODOLPHE. Then your satisfaction in going out with it should be the greater. This coat is the triumphant result of your collaboration with Providence.

MIMI. I do my part. Providence does His part. And you do no more than fifty sous' worth of your part.

RODOLPHE [*to* MUSETTE]. What shall I do? First she blames me for avarice because I worked up there at the manual of my uncle, and now she blames me for poverty because I am not yet paid for the manual.

MUSETTE. I should kiss her, monsieur. It is generally useful.

MIMI [*hands on hips, defying him*]. And sometimes it is particularly dangerous.

RODOLPHE. One can only try.

[*So he does try, and receives a smack.*

MIMI. For of such are the perils of precipitancy.

[*Enter* PHÉMIE, *in street-shawl, without hat.*

PHÉMIE. Monsieur Schaunard sends greetings and his invitation to us all to dine with him to-night.

RODOLPHE. Incredible.

PHÉMIE. And why?

MIMI. Yes. Why is it incredible?

RODOLPHE. Schaunard in funds?

MIMI. Oh? That appears to be possible to anyone but you.

RODOLPHE. But Schaunard is a composer. A composer in funds is as unnatural as a poet with a banking account.

PHÉMIE. Nevertheless, he has two hundred francs to-day. It results from the paroquet of the actress Dolores.

RODOLPHE. I see perfectly. The paroquet lays golden eggs and Schaunard found its nest.

PHÉMIE. No, but there is an Englishman who lives above the actress.

MIMI. An Englishman? A milord?

PHÉMIE. No. This one is rich, but he is not a milord. He is an esquire. Perhaps that is why he rises early. Dolores retires late, naturally.

MIMI. Reasonably.

PHÉMIE. And her paroquet screams when she comes home. The Englishman desires her to slay the paroquet, which disturbs his sleep.

MIMI. The pig.

PHÉMIE. Of course. And when she declines to sacrifice a life to the sloth of an Englishman, he fires pistols in his room in the morning to disturb her sleep. So she calls the police, and his pistols are removed from him, but is he reconciled to her paroquet? No: he engages Schaunard. The law permits him to make music in his room from morning till night. "But," says Schaunard, "the lady will not find my music disagreeable. My sonata——" "Pah," replies the Englishman, "you will play scales. No, not scales—one scale from five in the morning till evening and she will go mad." It is not indeed serious art, but what of that? The Englishman pays two hundred francs a month for a row, and to-day Schaunard has received the first month's pay. There! [*She flings coins on table.*

MIMI. It is the wages of heroism.

RODOLPHE. Even as I was heroic with a manual on chimneys. My feast is for another day, Mimi.

MIMI. You said it was for the landlord.

RODOLPHE. Bah! To the devil with all landlords!

MIMI. You mean that? You mean that when your uncle pays you will spend it in a night as Schaunard does?

RODOLPHE. I mean it.

MIMI [*getting the letter and tearing it*]. Then to the devil with all letters.

RODOLPHE. Mimi. [*Takes her hand.*]

PHÉMIE. Monsieur, there is a time for all things. Just now our business is to go out to spend heroically the heroic earnings of Monsieur Schaunard.

[*Collecting the coins from table.*

MIMI. Take Musette with you, Phémie.

MUSETTE. And these flowers, this work?

MIMI [*letting flowers trickle through her fingers*]. They won't fade, these flowers. They're better off than you and I. The flowers can wait, Musette, but youth . . . youth. . . .

[*Suddenly sits on chair and hides face in her arms on table.*

MUSETTE [*bending over her*]. What is it, Mimi?

MIMI [*lifting her head, wiping her eye*]. Nothing. Nothing but the shadow of a shade and the echo of a thought. [*Rises.*] Aren't you going with Phémie to buy the feast of Monsieur Schaunard?

MUSETTE. Yes. I will go.

MIMI. Buy wine. Plenty of wine. Wine makes you dream that you are going to live for ever.

MUSETTE. Mimi, are you ill?

MIMI. Who says I'm ill? Who spoke of illness?

PHÉMIE. Nobody.

MUSETTE. No, but you spoke of youth, and when we're young we do not speak of youth: we live it.

MIMI. Well, I am young and I spoke of youth, and I'm too young to be ill. Now go and buy the feast, Musette, the dinner of the heroic rival of a paroquet.

PHÉMIE. Yes, come, Musette. It will take four arms to carry back that feast. [*Exeunt* PHÉMIE *and* MUSETTE.

MIMI [*defiantly, as* RODOLPHE *looks anxiously*]. Ill? She makes us out a pretty pair. You are prudent and I am ill!

RODOLPHE. If I promise never to be prudent again, will you promise never to be ill?

MIMI [*tossing her head*]. I assert to you that my tooth is my tooth, and if it wants to ache it——

RODOLPHE. Oh, it shall, the libertine, but——

MIMI. And we are never ill. It is the law. We are never prudent and we are never ill.

RODOLPHE. Sometimes we are hungry, Mimi, and fifty sous are burning a hole in my pocket. Shall we—— ?

MIMI. But to-night we dine. [*Points to ceiling.*] I hope that in Turkey you have not grown into a glutton. Lunch and dine on the same day !

RODOLPHE. It has been done.

MIMI. Indeed ? And Monsieur the Mayor of Nantes? Would you have him come down from Marcel's studio to find his coat at large ?

RODOLPHE. That is a risk we run, but I didn't know that it was troubling you.

MIMI. Does it not occur to you that there is a change in the situation?

RODOLPHE [*takes out half-franc*]. I still have fifty sous. I still wear a black coat.

MIMI [*flings the half-franc out of window*]. There !

RODOLPHE. Oh, certainly, that makes a change of situation.

MIMI [*pointing to door*]. And didn't that ? Were we not to go out to enjoy the comparative privacy of a restaurant? And do we not now enjoy complete privacy by staying in?

RODOLPHE. Mimi! [*Taking her in his arms.*]

MIMI. Oh, what a lot of time you've wasted.

RODOLPHE. I didn't dare believe that my punishment was over.

MIMI. Never be away from me three days again, Rodolphe. [*She rests her head on his chest, then lifts it in saying :*] Of course, if I chose to be away from you, that would be quite a different thing.

RODOLPHE. I suppose that would be caprice?

MIMI. Life's like a song, and perhaps there are caprices in my song, but Rodolphe is its refrain.

RODOLPHE [*kissing her*]. Mimi.

MIMI. Rodolphe.

CURTAIN

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Norman McKinnel

Founded on an incident in Victor Hugo's novel "Les Misérables"

CHARACTERS

The Bishop
The Convict
Persomé, *the Bishop's sister, a widow*
Marie
Sergeant of Gendarmes

Time. *The beginning of last century.*
Place. *France, about thirty miles from Paris.*

This play was first produced at the Duke of York's Theatre on August 24, 1901, with the following cast:

The Bishop . . .	Mr A. E. George
The Convict . . .	Mr Norman McKinnel
Persomé	Miss Nannie Griffin
Marie	Miss Constance Walton
Sergeant of Gendarmes	Mr Frank Woolfe

Mr Norman McKinnel found the idea for the following play in Victor Hugo's masterpiece *Les Misérables*. The incident is described in the opening chapters of the novel, but although the Bishop himself disappears from the story his spirit runs through the whole book as a recurrent *motif*. He reveals the tremendous power of simple disinterested goodness.

Mr McKinnel, being an extremely fine actor, saw the dramatic possibilities of the story, and adapted it for presentation on the stage.

An interesting account of the author of "The Bishop's Candlesticks" may be read in *The Twentieth-Century Theatre*,[1] by Frank Vernon.

[1] Harrap, 5*s*.

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS[1]

SCENE: *The kitchen of the* BISHOP'S *cottage. It is plainly but substantially furnished. Doors R. and L. and L. C. Window R. C. Fireplace with heavy mantelpiece down R. Oak settle with cushions behind door L. C. Table in window R. C. with writing materials and crucifix (wood). Eight-day clock R. of window. Kitchen dresser with cupboard to lock down L. Oak dining table R. C. Chairs, books, etc. Winter wood scene without. On the mantelpiece are two very handsome candlesticks which look strangely out of place with their surroundings.*

MARIE *and* PERSOMÉ *discovered.* MARIE *stirring some soup on the fire.* PERSOMÉ *laying the cloth, etc.*

PERSOMÉ. Marie, isn't the soup boiling yet?

MARIE. Not yet, madam.

PERSOMÉ. Well it ought to be. You haven't tended the fire properly, child.

MARIE. But, madam, you yourself made the fire up.

PERSOMÉ. Don't answer me back like that. It is rude.

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOMÉ. Then don't let me have to rebuke you again.

MARIE. No, madam.

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

PERSOMÉ. I wonder where my brother can be. It is after eleven o'clock [*looking at the clock*] and no sign of him. Marie!

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOMÉ. Did Monseigneur the Bishop leave any message for me?

MARIE. No, madam.

PERSOMÉ. Did he tell you where he was going?

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOMÉ. "Yes, madam" [*imitating*]. Then why haven't you told me, stupid!

MARIE. Madam didn't ask me.

PERSOMÉ. But that is no reason for your not telling me, is it?

MARIE. Madam said only this morning I was not to chatter, so I thought——

PERSOMÉ. Ah, mon Dieu, you thought! Ah! It is hopeless.

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOMÉ. Don't keep saying "Yes, madam," like a parrot, nincompoop.

MARIE. No, madam.

PERSOMÉ. Well. Where did monseigneur say he was going?

MARIE. To my mother's, madam.

PERSOMÉ. To your mother's indeed! And why, pray?

MARIE. Monseigneur asked me how she was, and I told him she was feeling poorly.

PERSOMÉ. You told him she was feeling poorly, did you? And so my brother is to be kept out of his bed, and go without his supper because you told him she was feeling poorly. There's gratitude for you!

MARIE. Madam, the soup is boiling!

PERSOMÉ. Then pour it out, fool, and don't chatter.

[*Marie about to do so*] No, no. Not like that, here let me do it, and do you put the salt-cellars on the table—the silver ones.

MARIE. The silver ones, madam?

PERSOMÉ. Yes, the silver ones. Are you deaf as well as stupid?

MARIE. They are sold, madam.

PERSOMÉ. Sold! [*With horror*] Sold! Are you mad? Who sold them? Why were they sold?

MARIE. Monseigneur the Bishop told me this afternoon while you were out to take them to Monsieur Gervais who has often admired them, and sell them for as much as I could.

PERSOMÉ. But you had no right to do so without asking me.

MARIE. But, madam, Monseigneur the Bishop told me [*with awe*].

PERSOMÉ. Monseigneur the Bishop is a—ahem! But, but what can he have wanted with the money?

MARIE. Pardon, madam, but I think it was for Mère Gringoire.

PERSOMÉ. Mère Gringoire indeed! Mère Gringoire! What, the old witch who lives at the top of the hill, and who says she is bedridden because she is too lazy to do any work? And what did Mère Gringoire want with the money, pray?

MARIE. Madam, it was for the rent. The bailiff would not wait any longer and threatened to turn her out to-day if it were not paid, so she sent little Jean to monseigneur to ask for help and——

PERSOMÉ. Oh mon Dieu! It is hopeless, hopeless. We shall have nothing left. His estate is sold, his savings have gone. His furniture, everything. Were it not for my little dot we should starve, and now my beautiful—beautiful

[*sob*] salt-cellars. Ah, it is too much, too much. [*She breaks down crying.*]

MARIE. Madam, I am sorry, if I had known——

PERSOMÉ. Sorry, and why, pray? If Monseigneur the Bishop chooses to sell his salt-cellars he may do so, I suppose. Go and wash your hands, they are disgracefully dirty.

MARIE. Yes, madam [*going towards R.*].

[*Enter the* BISHOP, *C.*

BISHOP. Ah, how nice and warm it is in here! It is worth going out in the cold for the sake of the comfort of coming in. [PERSOMÉ *has hastened to help him off with his coat, etc.* MARIE *has dropped a deep curtsy.*] Thank you, dear [*looking at her*]. Why, what is the matter? You have been crying. Has Marie been troublesome, eh? [*Shaking his finger at her*] Ah!

PERSOMÉ. No, it wasn't Marie—but, but——

BISHOP. Well, well, you shall tell me presently. Marie, my child, run home now, your mother is better, I have prayed with her, and the doctor has been. Run home! [MARIE *putting on cloak and going.*] And, Marie, let yourself in quietly in case your mother is asleep.

MARIE. Oh, thanks, thanks, monseigneur.

[*She goes to door C., as it opens the snow drives in.*

BISHOP. Here, Marie, take my comforter, it will keep you warm. It is very cold to-night.

MARIE. Oh, no, monseigneur [*shamefacedly*]!

PERSOMÉ. What nonsense, brother, she is young, she won't hurt.

BISHOP. Ah, Persomé, you have not been out, you don't know how cold it has become. Here, Marie, let me put it on for you. [*Does so.*] There! Run along, little one.

[*Exit* MARIE, *C.*

PERSOMÉ. Brother, I have no patience with you. There,

sit down and take your soup, it has been waiting ever so long. And if it is spoilt it serves you right.

BISHOP. It smells delicious.

PERSOMÉ. I'm sure Marie's mother is not so ill that you need have stayed out on such a night as this. I believe those people *pretend* to be ill just to have the Bishop call on them. They have no thought of the Bishop!

BISHOP. It is kind of them to want to see me.

PERSOMÉ. Well for my part I believe that charity begins at home.

BISHOP. And so you make me this delicious soup. You are very good to me, sister.

PERSOMÉ. Good to you, yes! I should think so. I should like to know where you would be without me to look after you. The dupe of every idle scamp or lying old woman in the parish.

BISHOP. If people lie to me they are poorer, not I.

PERSOMÉ. But it is ridiculous, you will soon have nothing left. You give away everything, everything!!!

BISHOP. My dear, there is so much suffering in the world, and I can do so little [*sighs*], so very little.

PERSOMÉ. Suffering, yes, but you never think of the suffering you cause to those who love you best, the suffering you cause to me.

BISHOP [*rising*]. You, sister dear? Have I hurt you? Ah, I remember you had been crying. Was it my fault? I didn't mean to hurt you. I am sorry.

PERSOMÉ. Sorry. Yes. Sorry won't mend it. Humph! Oh, do go on eating your soup before it gets cold.

BISHOP. Very well, dear. [*Sits.*] But tell me——

PERSOMÉ. You are like a child, I can't trust you out of my sight. No sooner is my back turned than you get that little minx Marie to sell the silver salt-cellars.

BISHOP. Ah, yes, the salt-cellars. It is a pity. You, you were proud of them?

PERSOMÉ. Proud of them, why they have been in our family for years.

BISHOP. Yes, it is a pity, they were beautiful, but still, dear, one can eat salt out of china just as well.

PERSOMÉ. Yes, or meat off the floor, I suppose. Oh, it's coming to that. And as for that old wretch Mère Gringoire, I wonder she had the audacity to send here again. The last time I saw her I gave her such a talking to that it ought to have had some effect.

BISHOP. Yes! I offered to take her in here for a day or two, but she seemed to think it might distress you.

PERSOMÉ. Distress me!!!

BISHOP. And the bailiff, who is a very just man, would not wait longer for the rent, so—so—you see I *had* to pay it.

PERSOMÉ. *You had* to pay it. [*Gesture of comic despair.*

BISHOP. Yes, and you see I had no money so I had to dispose of the salt-cellars. It was fortunate I had them, wasn't it? [*Smiling*] But I'm sorry I have grieved you.

PERSOMÉ. Oh, go on! go on! you are incorrigible. You'll sell your candlesticks next.

BISHOP [*with real concern*]. No, no, sister, not my candlesticks.

PERSOMÉ. Oh! Why not? They would pay somebody's rent, I suppose.

BISHOP. Ah, you are good, sister, to think of that, but, but I don't want to sell them. You see, dear, my mother gave them to me on—on her deathbed just after you were born, and—and she asked me to keep them in remembrance of her, so I would like to keep them, but perhaps it is a sin to set such store by them?

PERSOMÉ. Brother, brother, you will break my heart

[*with tears in her voice*]. There! don't say anything more. Kiss me and give me your blessing. I'm going to bed. [*They kiss.*

[BISHOP *making sign of the Cross and murmuring blessing.*

[PERSOMÉ *locks cupboard door and turns to go.*

PERSOMÉ. Don't sit up too long and tire your eyes.

BISHOP. No, dear! Good night! [PERSOMÉ *exits R.*

BISHOP [*comes to table and opens a book, then looks up at the candlesticks*]. They would pay somebody's rent. It was kind of her to think of that.

[*He stirs the fire, trims the lamp, arranges some books and papers, sits down, is restless, shivers slightly, clock outside strikes twelve, and he settles to read. Music during this. Enter the* CONVICT *stealthily, he has a long knife and seizes the* BISHOP *from behind.*

CONVICT. If you call out you are a dead man!

BISHOP. But, my friend, as you see, I am reading. Why should I call out? Can I help you in any way?

CONVICT [*hoarsely*]. I want food. I'm starving. I haven't eaten anything for three days. Give me food quickly, quickly, curse you.

BISHOP [*eagerly*]. But certainly, my son, you shall have food. I will ask my sister for the keys of the cupboard. [*Rising.*

CONVICT. Sit down!!! [*The* BISHOP *sits, smiling.*] None of that, my friend! I'm too old a bird to be caught with chaff. You would ask your sister for the keys, would you? A likely story! You would rouse the house too. Eh? Ha! ha! A good joke truly. Come, where is the food. I want no keys. I have a wolf inside me tearing at my entrails, tearing me; quick, tell me where the food is.

BISHOP [*aside*]. I wish Persomé would not lock the cupboard. [*Aloud*] Come, my friend, you have nothing to fear. My sister and I are alone here.

CONVICT. How do I know that?

BISHOP. Why I have just told you.

[CONVICT *looks long at the* BISHOP.

CONVICT. Humph! I'll risk it. [BISHOP, *going to door R.*] But mind! Play me false and as sure as there are devils in hell I'll drive my knife through your heart. I have nothing to lose.

BISHOP. You have your soul to lose, my son, it is of more value than my heart. [*At door R. calling*] Persomé! Persomé!

[*The* CONVICT *stands behind him with his knife ready.*

PERSOMÉ [*within*]. Yes, brother.

BISHOP. Here is a poor traveller who is hungry. If you are not undressed will you come and open the cupboard and I will give him some supper.

PERSOMÉ [*within*]. What, at this time of night? A pretty business truly. Are we to have no sleep now, but to be at the beck and call of every ne'er-do-well who happens to pass?

BISHOP. But, Persomé, the traveller is hungry.

PERSOMÉ. Oh, very well, I am coming. [PERSOMÉ *enters R. Sees the knife in the* CONVICT'S *hand.*] [*Frightened*] Brother, what is he doing with that knife?

BISHOP. The knife, oh, well, you see, dear, perhaps he may have thought that I—I had *sold* ours. [*Laughs gently.*

PERSOMÉ. Brother, I am frightened. He glares at us like a wild beast [*aside to him*].

CONVICT. Hurry, I tell you. Give me food or I'll stick my knife in you both and help myself.

BISHOP. Give me the keys, Persomé, [*she gives them to him*] and now, dear, you may go to bed.

[PERSOMÉ *going. The* CONVICT *springs in front of her.*

CONVICT. Stop! Neither of you leave this room till I do.

[*She looks at the* BISHOP.

BISHOP. Persomé, will you favour this gentleman with your company at supper? He evidently desires it.

PERSOMÉ. Very well, brother.

[*She sits down at table staring at the two.*

BISHOP. Here is some cold pie and a bottle of wine and some bread.

CONVICT. Put them on the table, and stand below it so that I can see you.

[BISHOP *does so and opens drawer in table, taking out knife and fork, looking at the knife in* CONVICT'S *hand.*

CONVICT. *My* knife is sharp. [*He runs his finger along the edge and looks at them meaningly.*] And as for forks [*taking it up*] faugh! *steel.* [*He throws it away.*] We don't use forks in prison.

PERSOMÉ. Prison?

CONVICT [*cutting off an enormous slice, which he tears with his fingers like an animal, then starts*]. What was that? [*He looks at the door.*] Why the devil do you leave the window unshuttered and the door unbarred so that anyone can come in [*shutting them*]?

BISHOP. That is why they are left open.

CONVICT. Well, they are shut now!

BISHOP [*sighs*]. For the first time in thirty years.

[CONVICT *eats voraciously and throws a bone on the floor.*

PERSOMÉ. Oh, my nice clean floor!

[BISHOP *picks up the bone and puts it on plate.*

CONVICT. You're not afraid of thieves?

BISHOP. I am sorry for them.

CONVICT. Sorry for them. Ha! ha! ha! [*Drinks from*

bottle.] That's a good one. Sorry for them. Ha! ha! ha! [*Drinks.*] [*Suddenly*] What the devil are you?

BISHOP. I am a bishop.

CONVICT. Ha! ha! ha! A bishop. Holy Virgin, a bishop. Well I'm damned!

BISHOP. I hope you may escape that, my son. Persomé, you may leave us, this gentleman will excuse you.

PERSOMÉ. Leave you with——

BISHOP. Please! My friend and I can talk more—freely then.

[*By this time, owing to his starving condition, the wine has affected the* CONVICT.

CONVICT. What's that? Leave us. Yes, yes, leave us. Good night. I want to talk to the Bishop. The Bishop. Ha! ha! [*Laughs as he drinks and coughs.*

BISHOP. Good night, Persomé.

[*He holds the door open and she goes out R., holding in her skirts as she passes the* CONVICT.

CONVICT [*chuckling to himself*]. The Bishop. Ha! ha! Well I'm—— [*Suddenly very loudly*] D'you know what I am?

BISHOP. I think one who has suffered much.

CONVICT. Suffered [*puzzled*], suffered? My God, yes. [*Drinks.*] But that's a long time ago. Ha! ha! That was when I was a man, now I'm not a man; now I'm a number: number 15729, and I've lived in hell for ten years.

BISHOP. Tell me about it—about hell.

CONVICT. Why? [*Suspiciously*] Do you want to tell the police—to set them on my track?

BISHOP. No! I will not tell the police.

CONVICT [*looks at him earnestly*]. I believe you [*scratching his head*], but damn me if I know why.

BISHOP [*laying his hand on the* CONVICT's *arm*]. Tell me about the time—the time before you went to—hell.

CONVICT. It's so long ago I forgot, but I had a little cottage, there were vines growing on it [*dreamily*], they looked pretty with the evening sun on them and, and—there was a woman—she was [*thinking hard*]—she must have been my wife—yes. [*Suddenly and very rapidly*] Yes, I remember! she was ill, we had no food, I could get no work, it was a bad year, and my wife, my Jeanette, was ill, dying, [*pause*] so I stole to buy her food. [*Long pause. The* BISHOP *gently pats his hand.*] They caught me. I pleaded to them, I told them why I stole, but they laughed at me, and I was sentenced to ten years in the prison hulks, [*pause*] ten years in hell. The night I was sentenced the gaoler told me—told me Jeanette was dead. [*Sobs, with fury*] Ah, damn them, damn them. God curse them all.

[*He sinks on the table sobbing.*

BISHOP. Now tell me about the prison-ship, about hell.

CONVICT. Tell you about it? Look here, I was a man once. I'm a beast now, and they made me what I am. They chained me up like a wild animal, they lashed me like a hound. I fed on filth, I was covered with vermin, I slept on boards and I complained. Then they lashed me again. For ten years, ten years. Oh God! They took away my name, they took away my soul, and they gave me a devil in its place. But one day they were careless, one day they forgot to chain up their wild beast, and he escaped. He was free. That was six weeks ago. I was free, free to starve.

BISHOP. To starve?

CONVICT. Yes, to starve. They feed you in hell, but when you escape from it you starve. They were hunting me everywhere and I had no passport, no name. So I stole again, I stole these rags, I stole my food daily, I slept in the woods, in barns, anywhere. I dare not ask for work, I dare not go into a town to beg, so I stole, and they have made

me what I am, they have made me a thief. God curse them all.

[*Empties the bottle and throws it into the fireplace R., smashing it.*

BISHOP. My son, you have suffered much, but there is hope for all.

CONVICT. Hope! Hope! Ha! ha! ha! [*Laughs wildly.*

BISHOP. You have walked far, you are tired. Lie down and sleep on the couch there, and I will get you some coverings.

CONVICT. And if anyone comes?

BISHOP. No one will come, but if they do, are you not my friend?

CONVICT. Your friend [*puzzled*]?

BISHOP. They will not molest the Bishop's friend.

CONVICT. The Bishop's friend.

[*Scratching his head, utterly puzzled.*

BISHOP. I will get the coverings. [*Exit L.*

CONVICT [*looks after him, scratches his head*]. The Bishop's friend! [*He goes to fire to warm himself and notices the candlesticks. He looks round to see if he is alone, and takes them down, weighing them.*] Silver, by God, and heavy. What a prize!

[*He hears the* BISHOP *coming, and in his haste drops one candlestick on the table.*

[*Enter the* BISHOP.

BISHOP [*sees what is going on, but goes to the settle up L. with coverings*]. Ah, you are admiring my candlesticks. I am proud of them. They were a gift from my mother. A little too handsome for this poor cottage perhaps, but all I have to remind me of her. Your bed is ready. Will you lie down now?

CONVICT. Yes, yes, I'll lie down now. [*Puzzled*] Look here, why the devil are you—ki—kind to me. [*Suspiciously*] What do you want? Eh?

BISHOP. I want you to have a good sleep, my friend.

CONVICT. I believe you want to convert me; save my soul, don't you call it? Well it's no good, see? I don't want any damned religion, and as for the Church, bah! I hate the Church.

BISHOP. That is a pity, my son, as the Church does not hate you.

CONVICT. You are going to try to convert me. Oh, ha! ha! that's a good idea. Ha! ha! ha! No, no, Monseigneur the Bishop. I don't want any of your Faith, Hope, and Charity, see? So anything you do for me you're doing to the devil, understand [*defiantly*]?

BISHOP. One must do a great deal for the devil, in order to do a little for God.

CONVICT [*angrily*]. I don't want any damned religion, I tell you.

BISHOP. Won't you lie down now, it is late?

CONVICT [*grumbling*]. Well all right, but I won't be preached at, I—I—— [*On couch*] You're sure no one will come?

BISHOP. I don't think they will, but if they do—you yourself have locked the door.

CONVICT. Humph! I wonder if it's safe. [*He goes to the door and tries it, then turns and sees the* BISHOP *holding the covering, annoyed.*] Here! you go to bed. I'll cover myself. [*The* BISHOP *hesitates.*] Go on, I tell you.

BISHOP. Good night, my son. [*Exit L.*

[CONVICT *waits till he is off, then tries the* BISHOP'S *door.*

CONVICT. No lock of course. Curse it. [*Looks round and sees the candlesticks again.*] Humph! I'll have another look at them. [*He takes them up and toys with them.*] Worth hundreds I'll warrant. If I had these turned into money they'd start me fair. Humph! The old boy's fond of them too, said his mother gave him them. His

mother, yes. They didn't think of *my* mother when they sent me to hell. He was kind to me too—but what's a bishop for except to be kind to you? Here, cheer up, my hearty, you're getting soft. God! wouldn't my chain-mates laugh to see 15729 hesitating about collaring the plunder because he felt good. Good! Ha! ha! Oh my God! Good! Ha! ha! 15729 getting soft. That's a good one. Ha! ha! No, I'll take his candlesticks and go, if I stay here he'll preach at me in the morning and I'll get soft. Damn him and his preaching too. Here goes!

[*He takes the candlesticks, stows them in his coat, and cautiously exits L. C. As he does so the door slams.*

PERSOMÉ [*without*]. Who's there? Who's there, I say? Am I to get no sleep to-night? Who's there, I say? [*Enter R.* PERSOMÉ.] I'm sure I heard the door shut. [*Looking round*] No one here? [*Knocks at the* BISHOP'S *door L. Sees the candlesticks have gone.*] The candlesticks, the candlesticks. They are gone. Brother, brother, come out. Fire, murder, thieves! [*Enter* BISHOP, *L.*

BISHOP. What is it, dear, what is it? What is the matter?

PERSOMÉ. He has gone. The man with the hungry eyes has gone, and he has taken your candlesticks.

BISHOP. Not my candlesticks, sister, surely not those. [*He looks and sighs.*] Ah that is hard, very hard, I, I—— He might have left me those. They were all I had.

[*Almost breaking down.*

PERSOMÉ. Well, but go and inform the police. He can't have gone far. They will soon catch him, and you'll get the candlesticks back again. You don't deserve them, though, leaving them about with a man like that in the house.

BISHOP. You are right, Persomé. It was my fault. I led him into temptation.

PERSOMÉ. Oh, nonsense! Led him into temptation indeed! The man is a thief, a common scoundrelly thief. I knew it the moment I saw him. Go and inform the police or I will. [*Going, but he stops her.*

BISHOP. And have him sent back to prison [*very softly*], sent back to hell! No, Persomé. It is a just punishment for me; I set too great store by them. It was a sin. My punishment is just, but oh God, it is hard, it is very hard. [*He buries his head in his hands.*

PERSOMÉ. No, brother, you are wrong. If you won't tell the police I will. I will not stand by and see you robbed. I know you are my brother and my bishop and the best man in all France, but you are a fool, I tell you, a child, and I will not have your goodness abused. I shall go and inform the police [*going*].

BISHOP. Stop, Persomé. The candlesticks were mine, they are *his* now. It is better so. He has more need of them than I. My mother would have wished it so had she been here.

PERSOMÉ. But—— [*Great knocking without.*

SERGEANT [*without*]. Monseigneur, monseigneur, we have something for you, may we enter?

BISHOP. Enter, my son.

[*Enter* SERGEANT *and three* GENDARMES *with* CONVICT *bound. The* SERGEANT *carries the candlesticks.*

PERSOMÉ. Ah so they have caught you, villain, have they?

SERGEANT. Yes, madam, we found this scoundrel slinking along the road, and as he wouldn't give any account of himself we arrested him on suspicion. Holy Virgin, isn't he strong and didn't he struggle? While we were securing him these candlesticks fell out of his pockets. [PERSOMÉ *seizes them, goes to table, and brushes them with her apron lovingly.*] I remembered the candlesticks of Monseigneur

the Bishop, so we brought him here that you might identify them and then we'll lock him up.

[*The* BISHOP *and the* CONVICT *have been looking at each other. The* CONVICT *with dogged defiance.*

BISHOP. But, but I don't understand, this gentleman is my very good friend.

SERGEANT. Your *friend*, monseigneur!! Holy Virgin! Well!!!

BISHOP. Yes, my friend, he did me the honour to sup with me to-night and I—I have given him the candlesticks.

SERGEANT [*incredulously*]. You gave *him*, *him* your candlesticks? Holy Virgin!

BISHOP [*severely*]. Remember, my son, that she is holy.

SERGEANT [*saluting*]. Pardon, monseigneur.

BISHOP. And now I think you may let your prisoner go.

SERGEANT. But he won't show me his papers, he won't tell me who he is.

BISHOP. I have told you he is my friend.

SERGEANT. Yes, that's all very well, but——

BISHOP. He is your Bishop's friend, surely that is enough.

SERGEANT. Well, but——

BISHOP. Surely?

[*A pause. The* SERGEANT *and the* BISHOP *look at each other.*

SERGEANT. I—I—— Humph! [*To his men*] Loose the prisoner. [*They do so.*] Right about turn, quick march!

[*Exit* SERGEANT *and* GENDARMES. *A long pause.*

CONVICT [*very slowly, as if in a dream*]. You told them you had given me the candlesticks, given me them. By God!

PERSOMÉ [*shaking her fist at him and hugging the candlesticks to her breast*]. Oh, you scoundrel, you pitiful scoundrel, you come here and are fed, and warmed, and—and you thieve; steal from your benefactor. Oh, you blackguard.

BISHOP. Persomé, you are overwrought. Go to your room.

PERSOMÉ. What, and leave you with him to be cheated again, perhaps murdered. No, I will not.

BISHOP [*with slight severity*]. Persomé, leave us, I wish it.

[*She looks hard at him, then turns towards her door.*

PERSOMÉ. Well, if I must go at least I'll take the candlesticks with me.

BISHOP [*more severely*]. Persomé, place the candlesticks on that table and leave us.

PERSOMÉ [*defiantly*]. I will not!

BISHOP [*loudly and with great severity*]. I, your bishop, command it.

[PERSOMÉ *does so with great reluctance and exits R.*

CONVICT [*shamefacedly*]. Monseigneur, I'm glad I didn't get away with them, curse me, I am. I'm glad.

BISHOP. Now won't you sleep here? See, your bed is ready.

CONVICT. No! [*Looking at the candlesticks*] No! no! I daren't, I daren't—besides I must go on, I must get to Paris, it is big, and I—I can be lost there, they won't find me there and I must travel at night, do you understand?

BISHOP. I see—you must travel by night.

CONVICT. I—I—didn't believe there was any good in the world—one doesn't when one has been in hell, but somehow I—I—know you're good and, and it's a queer thing to ask but—but could you, would you bless me before I go—I—I think it would help me. I——

[*Hangs his head very shamefacedly.*

[BISHOP *makes sign of the Cross and murmurs blessing.*

CONVICT [*tries to speak, but a sob almost chokes him*]. Good night. [*He hurries towards the door.*

BISHOP. Stay, my son, you have forgotten your property [*giving him the candlesticks*].

CONVICT. You mean me—you want me to take them?

BISHOP. Please, they may help you. [*The* CONVICT *takes the candlesticks in absolute amazement.*] And, my son, there is a path through the woods at the back of this cottage which leads to Paris, it is a very lonely path, and I have noticed that my good friends the gendarmes do not like lonely paths at night. It is curious.

CONVICT. Ah, thanks, thanks, monseigneur. I—I—— [*He sobs.*] Ah! I'm a fool, a child to cry, but somehow you have made me feel that—that it is just as if something had come into me—as if I were a man again and not a wild beast.

[*The door at back is open, and the* CONVICT *is standing in it.*

BISHOP [*putting his hand on his shoulder*]. Always remember, my son, that this poor body is the Temple of the Living God.

CONVICT [*with great awe*]. The Temple of the Living God. I'll remember. [*Exit L. C.*

[*The* BISHOP *closes the door and goes quietly to the prie-dieu in the window R., he sinks on his knees, and bows his head in prayer.*

SLOW CURTAIN

BETWEEN THE SOUP AND THE SAVOURY

By Gertrude Jennings

CHARACTERS

Maria, *the cook*
Ada, *the parlourmaid*
Emily, *the kitchenmaid*

The scene represents a kitchen.

This play was produced on October 19, 1910, at the Playhouse, London, by Mr Cyril Maude, with the following cast:

Maria . . . . *Margaret Murray*
Ada . . . . *Maude Buchanan*
Emily . . . . *Ethel Ross*

Miss Gertrude Jennings is without rival in the popularity of her one-act plays. The simplicity of her craftsmanship commends her, especially, to amateur actors whose stage equipment is meagre, while her skill in writing character-parts for women, and her shrewd and often caustic comments on everyday occurrences, contribute to her vogue. The Prince of Wales (following royal precedent of long ago when James I's daughter Elizabeth appeared at Whitehall in "Tethys's Festival") acted on shipboard in her one-act play "The Bathroom Door."

"Waiting for the Bus," "Five Birds in a Cage," and "At the Ribbon Counter" are typical examples of Miss Jennings's ability to place a handful of people in a more or less humorous predicament and to show their reactions to one another. Of her long plays "The Young Person in Pink" is the best known.

BETWEEN THE SOUP AND THE SAVOURY[1]

The scene is a cheerful, bright kitchen, and the time the beginning of dinner—upstairs.

EMILY, *a meek, pathetic little kitchenmaid, is at the range;* COOK, *a handsome, buxom woman, is washing parsley.*

COOK. Did I put any salt in the soup, Hemily?

EMILY. Yus, Cook.

COOK. Saw me do it, did you?

EMILY. Yus, Cook.

COOK. She turns back this morning when I thought I'd got rid of her and sez, "Cook," she sez, "your master tells me you don't know the use of salt." Those were her very words.

EMILY. And what did you say?

COOK. Oh, I never loses my temper, however much I'm 'ectored, so I just answered quiet like but firm: "Well, mum," I sez, "it's a good thing he knows *something* which I don't." You should 'ave seen 'er look.

EMILY. Lor'!

COOK. Oh, I don't believe in flying out at people. Not that I'd let myself be put upon neither. My mother that lives in Putney brought me up most careful in that respect.

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

" Marie," she sez, " you remember who you are and others will do the same. That's the way."

EMILY. I should like to see anyone down you.

COOK. Neither wouldn't I. I'm just the same with Mr Pollard. " Arthur," I sez, " if you wants to spend an afternoon with me on Sunday we go to Kew or nowhere." Just like that—quite pleasant.

EMILY. And 'e 'as ter go?

COOK. Should think so! Not that we've bin yet, but it's all the same principle [ADA, *a smart, pretty girl with a brisk manner and rather a strident voice, enters, carrying a tray with soup-plates*], so just you 'old to that, Emily, and don't make yourself cheap with no young man.

ADA. Don't you waste time advising *her* what to do, Marie. Can you see Emily with a young man? Not much!

COOK. Soup all right?

ADA. Not enough salt.

COOK. 'Oo says so?

ADA. 'She' did. Open like. Master tastes it, puts down his spoon, and raises his eyebrows, so—'she' flushes up and says quiet like, " I *have* mentioned it." Master says, " Not with much effect."

COOK. Ho, indeed! Was that all?

ADA. Yes. I suppose he didn't like to use language in front of Miss Angela's fiangcée.

EMILY [*timidly*]. 'Ow is Mr Forbes looking, miss?

ADA [*looking her up and down scornfully*]. Now then, 'urry up with those plates! [EMILY *does so.*] Rose is always out when there's company. [*She goes.*

EMILY. Ada's a bit short with me sometimes.

COOK. Well, it's none of your business asking after the gentry. What's it to you how Mr Forbes is? Are the pertatoes ready? [EMILY *tries them with a fork.*

EMILY. Just on. I only asked after Mr Forbes bekos he's going ter marry Miss Angela.

COOK [*consulting a cookery book*]. You put enough salt in the soup next time, and don't be filling your head with romances.

EMILY. I only——

COOK. There, that's enough. Where's Rose gone to-night?

EMILY. Mr Fuller is a-taking of her ter the Exhibition.

COOK. Has she asked 'her' for late?

EMILY. Naow.

COOK. Lor'! Took the key, 'as she?

EMILY. Naow.

COOK. There now, that beats me. You'll have ter sit up, and mind you're quiet opening the door. That lower 'inge still squeaks. She said ter me only Saturday, "'No one out after ten' is my rule, as you know, Cook, and please remind the others"—which I never did. However, it's a poor heart that never rejoices. Pick up that spoon. You'll be wanting it in a minute, and then it will be minus.

[EMILY *picks up the spoon.*

EMILY. I wish I had somebody ter walk out with.

COOK. You walk out with them pertatoes if they're done.

[*Enter* ADA, *with a tray: she looks in a hand-glass and puts her cap straight.* EMILY *is now dishing up the potatoes.*

ADA. Lively lot in there, I must say. Master looks like old Nick.

COOK. Per'aps he's made a fool of himself on the Stock Exchange, as per usual.

ADA. Oh, I dessay. He generally works it off on the family.

EMILY. Ain't Miss Angela in her usual, Miss Makepeace?

ADA [*ignoring her*]. Mr Forbes, he's hardly spoke, and it's

my belief there's something up between him and Miss Angela, for he hasn't pressed her foot under the table once, nor eaten her bread, which is his custom, and more than that, when master was arguing with 'her' over the electric light bill I heard Miss Angela say quite plain, "If you don't believe me there's no more to be said!" Just like that.

EMILY. How beautiful!

ADA [*sharply*]. What are you a-hanging round listening for? Be off!

[EMILY *turns away, gets fowls and exits to lift.*

COOK. And what did Mr Forbes say?

ADA. Couldn't quite catch the beginning, as master he bellows so, but it was something like—"If you'd cared for them it couldn't have happened."

COOK. 'Them'! That's queer! If it had been 'me,' I'd have understood. [*The bell from the dining-room rings.*

ADA. Well, they 'ave gobbled and no mistake. You did say no *entrée*? [EMILY *re-enters.*

COOK. Yes. Only roast fowls. Emily——

EMILY. Yes, mum, they're on the lift.

ADA. Pity you're such an image to look at. I'd like a little extra help upstairs. Come along with that bread sauce! [EMILY *brings it.*] Hurry up! [*Between them they upset the sauce.*] There, you've dropped it!

EMILY. I didn't!

ADA. Don't argue. Lucky it's fallen on the table. Spoon it up. What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve over. [*The bell rings again.*] Oh, keep it up! [*She exits.*

EMILY. You know I didn't drop it, Cook. She did it 'erself.

COOK. Emily, you ferget yourself! Put them dishes under the tap and don't let me hear no nonsense. What next, I wonder!

EMILY. I'm sorry, Cook.

[*She takes the soup-plates away to the sink.*

COOK [*breaking eggs and beating them in bowl*]. Well, so long as you sees you're wrong. A-critikizing of Miss Makepeace, indeed!

EMILY. I know it were taking a liberty, Cook. I forget myself.

COOK. I should think so.

EMILY. It comes over me sometimes just like a sort of spasm, ter think I'm the same as others.

COOK. Don't you encourage them fancies, Emily. They're morbid, that's what they are.

EMILY. What's morbid, Cook?

COOK [*adding milk and sugar*]. Morbid? Why, you ought to know that. It's like—— You ought ter be ashamed of yourself fer asking. Where's the vanilla?

EMILY. 'Ere it is! [*Takes it from table, and gives it to* COOK]. I can't 'elp thinking sometimes when I'm a-washing up what it 'ud be like ter be a young lady wot had a young man ter walk out with.

COOK. Well, you won't never have one, Emily. You haven't the looks—not unless it was a blind man or a widower with children wot needed managing. You needn't look at me so hot. I'm only telling you for your good.

[*Pours soufflé from the bowl into a dish, and puts it into the oven.*

EMILY. Perhaps as I can't 'ave no young man you might learn me ter be a real cook some day.

COOK. Not I. You're too 'eavy-'anded. No, there's some people meant ter be kitchenmaids, and you're one of 'em.

[ADA *enters with the fish-plates.*

ADA. Master's in a stew, I can tell you. Says the bread sauce tastes of paraffin. Give us that chair.

[EMILY *gets a chair and* ADA *sits down.*

COOK. Lor'! There was a drop of paraffin on the table, now you mention it.

ADA. 'She' asked me why there was paraffin in the bread sauce, under her breath, when I was passing the greens. Just ter shame her I spoke out loud—like this—"I couldn't say, mum." That finished her.

COOK. She never gets the better of you.

ADA. Should 'ope not. Miss Angela and Mr Forbes are going on like anything.

COOK. Making up to each other?

ADA. Not them. I should say it's about broken off by now.

EMILY [*creeping down to* ADA, *in an agitated voice*]. Oh, naouw, Miss Makepeace. My heart bleeds ter 'ear it. It can't be true.

ADA. Hulloa, what's all this? Well, you 'ave got some sauce! Upon my word!

COOK. Don't mind 'er, Ada. Her head's turned reading novelettes. She's all on love and marriage, and wishes she 'ad a young man.

ADA. A young man? Her? Oh, don't, Cook, you'll be the death of me. [*She finishes her sentence between shrill laughs.*] Emily with a young man! Oh, I shall split myself!

COOK. I told her she was morbid. [*Also laughing.*

ADA. I should say so! [*Still laughing*] Look at her! What sort of young man will you have, Emily? Oh, dear! There's the grocer's boy—he isn't more than half wanting. Would he do? Or Buggins that was in the motor accident—he's still got some face left—you'd suit him nicely! [*By now she and* COOK *are quite hysterical. The bell rings. There is a sudden silence.*] Now, they can't have got through that, not if they ate with both hands.

COOK. It's only for vegetables, I expect.

[ADA *snorts, takes up her tray and goes out.*

[COOK *brings ingredients and begins making the savoury.*

COOK. Not but what they 'ands the vegetables themselves when Rose is out, don't they?

[*There is a pause.* EMILY *is too much hurt to answer.*

COOK. Now then, Emily, what's the matter with you? You're never sulking over what's bin said, are you? Well, you are a caution, and no mistake! Taking offence just bekos we were having a bit of fun! Me and Ada can't 'elp your looks.

EMILY. It ain't that, Cook.

COOK. Well, what is it, then?

EMILY. You won't believe me if I tell yer.

COOK. You think I'm a regular Roman! Out with it! I'll believe yer if I can.

EMILY. Well, Cook, I *'ave* got a young man, so there!

COOK. Oh, go on. You're romancing.

EMILY. I'm not, neither. I've got a real young man. He's not Buggins, nor 'e ain't the grocer's boy. He's a regular idol.

COOK. 'Ere, Emily, if you think I'm going ter swallow *your* capers you're extremely mistook. You do your work and don't tell me none of your embroideries.

EMILY. But, Cook——

COOK. That's enough! [ADA *returns.*

ADA. Marie!

COOK. Well?

ADA. I'll ask you ter give a guess as to Master's latest.

COOK [*bored*]. Oh, lor'! Found a bit of grit in the gravy?

ADA. No!

COOK. Chickens taste of paper?

ADA. No.

COOK. I give it up. Wot is it?

ADA. Too much noise in the kitchen.

COOK [*springing up*]. What?

ADA. It's a fact!

COOK. Well, I'm——!

ADA. So am I.

COOK. Too much *noise*!

ADA. Of course, if we're negro slaves let 'im say so and be done with it.

COOK. Eggsactly!

ADA. Per'aps he'd like us ter live dumb mutes with cashmeres round our heads. That 'ud suit his taste, no doubt.

COOK. It's news ter me that because you 'ave a light 'and with pastry you're not permitted ter smile.

ADA. Or that it's a sin to pass a few pleasant remarks in the retreat of your own apartments.

COOK. What did 'she' say?

ADA. She was frightened. I could see that. I closed the door very quiet, and just caught her speech—"You'll have to replace them, that's all."

COOK. That's sense, that is.

ADA. Oh, 'she''s no fool.

COOK. If it wasn't for Mr Pollard I should certainly leave at the month.

ADA. Of course I showed them just what I thought of it.

COOK. Natchally.

ADA. I said, "Very sorry, mum, it shan't occur again," and left the room.

COOK. Very proper.

ADA. And now, Emily, you see what comes of your putting *yourself* forward. If you 'adn't said that about wanting some one to walk out with——

COOK. Oh, but you ain't 'eard the latest, Ada.

ADA. Why, wot is it?

COOK. Emily says—— [*She laughs under her breath.*

ADA. Well, get on!

COOK. Emily says—— [*She laughs again.*

ADA. 'Urry up!

COOK. Go on, Emily, I can't!

EMILY. It ain't nothing, Miss Makepeace. Only—I *'ave* got a young man, that's all.

ADA. Oh, 'ave you? Where do you keep 'im, Emily? In the larder, or up the chimney?

[COOK *gives a loud laugh.*

ADA. Sh! Cook! [*She points upwards.*] Wot's his name, Emily? Wot's he like?

EMILY. I can't sorter describe 'im, but 'is name is 'Arold.

ADA. 'Arold! Oh, lor'! I suppose he's rich, eh?

EMILY. He has a confidency.

ADA. Hold my hand, Cook. And does he love you, Emily?

EMILY. Yuss, he does.

ADA. Has he spoken of his devotion?

EMILY. Yuss, he 'as. [COOK *giggles.*

ADA. Be quiet, Marie! And written you letters?

EMILY. 'Undreds.

ADA. You've kept 'im pretty close, Emily.

EMILY. It didn't seem some'ow delicate ter speak of 'im.

COOK [*in an outburst of impatience*]. Oh, Emily, how you can stand there! I should think the floor would open beneath you.

EMILY. It's true what I'm telling you.

ADA. She'll face you out with it, see if she don't.

COOK. Now get on with your work, Emily. You do beat everything to-night. I don't know what's come over you.

EMILY. What 'ud make you believe I'm speaking the truth?

ADA [*winking at* COOK]. Well, seeing's believing, so I'm told.

COOK. Yes, let's 'ave a look at 'Arold, that's all.

EMILY. So you shall, but he's away just now.

ADA. Oh, I dare say. He'll stop there, too.

COOK. Per'aps you've got a letter of 'is, Emily?

ADA. Yes. Per'aps you can show us something sweet in writing.

EMILY. Well, per'aps I can.

ADA. Let's see you do it, then.

EMILY. If I fetch you one, will you promise not ter snatch it?

COOK. Certainly.

EMILY. I'll read you one, then.

ADA. That's right.

[EMILY *goes off. The two other servants look at each other.*

ADA [*to* COOK]. She's going to make it all up.

COOK. That's it!

[EMILY *returns with a little packet made of dirty newspaper.*

COOK. Where 'ave yer 'ad it?

EMILY. In the boot-box, wrapped up.

ADA. Well, I never did! Now then, read it out.

EMILY. You won't believe me without?

ADA. Not likely!

[*She and* COOK *settle themselves in chairs to listen.* EMILY *still hesitates. At last she unfolds the newspaper, and, extracting a letter, reads. The servants giggle at first, but gradually become impressed.*

EMILY [*reading*]. "Dearest little woman. It seems years since I saw you last, and the stupid days never will go by and bring us to Saturday——"

COOK. Saturday! Why, you 'aven't 'ad Saturday out since I've bin 'ere!

EMILY [*hesitating*]. Naow, but I—I used ter meet 'im at the corner when you sent me out ter post the letters.

COOK. Mean ter say he hung about on the chance of that? Why——

ADA. Hush, Marie! Go on, Emily.

EMILY [*reading*]. "I think abart you all day long, when I ought ter be doing my work——"

COOK. He'll get the sack, see if he don't.

EMILY. "And all the while old Grub thinks I'm answering letters I'm drawing your dear little face on the blotting-paper——"

ADA. Dear—little—face! Yours!

EMILY. "I wasn't much of a feller before I knew you, dearest of all, but you've made me ashamed of myself, and I mean to do all I can to be more worthy of you and your love."

ADA. Well, I never.

EMILY. "I think per'aps a good woman never really understands 'ow much her ex—exis—tence means ter the man 'oo loves her. It reminds 'im of all the things 'e 'eard and saw when 'e was a little feller, and the world was so wonderful—flowers and sunsets, and the sound of 'is mother's voice teaching 'im 'is prayers. 'E didn't think abart it all at the time, but when years 'ave gorn by 'e begins to remember and ter know that 'e was 'appy then. And this 'appiness you bring back to me, my darling, because I love you and because you are so far better than I shall ever be. Always, always yours, 'Arold."

[*There is a long pause. They are all rather subdued,* EMILY *is almost crying. She replaces the letter in the packet.*

ADA. She hasn't made that up.

COOK. I must say it really is a beautiful letter.

ADA. I've 'eard worse.

COOK [*reflectively*]. I can't quite make out 'ow he *sees* all that in you, Emily.

ADA. No, still there's no doubt he has a very gentlemanly way of expressing his feelings, be they what they may.

COOK. Quite 'andsome I call it. I congratulate you, Emily. Not that I believe it'll ever come to anything.

EMILY. Oh, don't you think so, Cook?

COOK. No, I don't. What do you say, Ada?

ADA. Don't sound like it. All that poetry is suspicious. They come straight ter the point if they mean anything. Still, even ter walk out with, he's very superior. Tell you what—— [*The bell again.*] Oh, lor'! there's that old bell! I'll 'ear more when I come down. Give us the sweet, Emily.

COOK. Good 'evins! if I ain't forgot about the *soufflé*!

[COOK *and* EMILY *rush to the oven.*

COOK. This is a day of misfortune! Drat me, gossiping here while my dinner's getting spoiled!

[*As they bustle about the bell rings again.*

COOK. Give it 'ere, Emily. 'Urry up! Why, it's all flat, and black as coal. Can't be helped. Wasn't your fault. There, pour the cream over it. [EMILY *does so.*

ADA. Pretty looking sight, that is! If it hadn't been for Emily——

COOK. No, no, it ain't the girl's fault. There! Let's 'ope they won't notice. [*The bell rings.*] Get on, Ada!

ADA. That's right, ring away. [*She goes.*

EMILY. I'm very sorry, Cook!

COOK. Don't you fret. Be ready ter take the fowls off the lift. I do call it mean of 'her' not to let us finish 'em up. We've had that salt beef for three days. 'Owever,

we've got that choice little bit of savoury to-night. And I've made an extra lot, so's there'll be enough for every one. Now tell us more about your young man, Emily. What made you used to pretend you 'adn't got one?

EMILY [*awkwardly*]. I dunno, Cook.

COOK. Oh, come, you must 'ave some reason.

EMILY. Well, you see, it's all been 'ushed up bekos 'is father objects ter the match.

COOK. Does he, now? Well, I call that a shame. I don't say you're a beauty, Emily, but looks ain't everything. What does he do fer a living—'Arold, I mean?

EMILY [*hesitating*]. Oh, he's in the carpentering.

COOK. Oh! Then why is he writing all day long, as he said in the letter?

EMILY [*embarrassed*]. He—he 'as ter take measures and keep them in a book.

COOK. Funny. I never 'eard tell of any such thing. There's the lift.

[EMILY *fetches the dish of fowls from the lift outside.*
COOK *inspects the carcases disparagingly.*

COOK. They've made those fowls look pretty miserable. I wonder if 'she' 'd miss that wing if—— Put 'em in the larder. [EMILY *does so.*

COOK. You might tell us a bit more while we're waiting.

EMILY. More?

COOK. Yes. Seems ter me it 'ud be soothing after seeing those chickens. Now, as 'e ever given you anythink?

EMILY. Yuss, Cook. He giv me a locket and a anagram.

COOK. Anagram? What's a anagram?

EMILY. It's poetry.

COOK. Do you know it?

EMILY. Yuss, I think so——

COOK. Go on! Let's 'ear it.

EMILY. All right, Cook. [*Monotonously.*

"My first is coloured like the rose,
That scents the garden far and wide;
My second tells of sparkling snows;
My third——"

COOK. I can't make head or tail of that, Emily. If that's an anagrammar I can do without it. You might show us the locket.

EMILY. The locket?

COOK. Yes, the one he sent you.

EMILY [*embarrassed*]. Oh, that one. I—sent it back.

COOK. Never!

EMILY. Yes, I did. I thought it wasn't right for me to take it.

COOK. Well, you were a looney! Catch me a-sending back of any jewellery or suchlike. Now if it was the anagrammar you sent back I could 'ave understood it. Is that Ada back so soon? [*Enter* ADA, *bringing the soufflé-dish.*

ADA. They 'aven't touched the pudding, Cook, no more than just ter play with it. Master, he laughed contemptuous, and pushed 'is plate away. Mr Forbes, he made an effort, but hid most under his spoon, and as to Missus, she bit her lip.

COOK [*moving to the oven and making ready the savoury*]. Well, the savoury's just on ready. It's angels on horseback.

ADA. Enough for us? I always was partial to that.

COOK. I've made six good 'elpings, and Miss Angela don't touch it, so we ought ter 'ave three over. Don't offer it a second time.

ADA. No fear. What do you take me for? Oh, I've found out what was the matter between Miss Angela and Mr F.

COOK. Oh, indeed ? [EMILY *shows interest.*

ADA. Yes. Seems she's lost something he sent her and it's caused such a to-do.

COOK. What is it that's lost?

ADA. Something by the name of an anagram. [EMILY *in agitation drops a knife on a plate.*] He said a bit of it—something about my first and my second : sounded like his wives.

COOK [*startled*]. My first and my second !

ADA. Yes. I don't wonder you're surprised. From all I could hear it was some sort of a riddle, and they was to have found it out together. My first is coloured like a nose —or some such contrivance. Come on with the savoury. We shall never be finished.

COOK. Did he say anything about some locket he'd sent her ?

ADA. Yes—how did you know?

COOK. Something told me.

[*The bell rings. She puts the savoury on* ADA's *tray.*

ADA. Oh, they're a hungry lot, they are ! They won't be a minute polishing this off. I shall stop up for the fruit. Bye-bye, I am looking forward to this savoury.

[*The bell goes again. She makes a face at ceiling and exits, closing the door behind her with her foot.*

COOK. Well, Emily, per'aps you'll be so good as to explain yourself!

EMILY. Explain myself?

COOK. That's what I said. You're not going to tell me there's two young men a-sending of two lockets and two anagrammars to both of you?

EMILY. No, Cook.

COOK. No, Cook. I should think not ! You—you 'aven't bin carryin' on with Mr Forbes, 'ave you?

EMILY. No, Cook.

COOK. Stop calling me no Cook! There can't be a sort of epidemic of anagrammars, I serppose?

EMILY. No, Cook.

COOK. Well then, Emily Ashe, what in 'evin's name has happened?

EMILY. I don't feel as I can ever explain.

COOK. Well, you have a try, that's all, or it might be my dooty to go to Missus.

EMILY. Oh no, Cook.. I *will* tell you, only I'm put to it to begin, some'ow.

COOK. Well, I'll look the other way. Go on.

EMILY. Well, first there ain't no 'Arold at all.

COOK. *No* 'Arold?

EMILY. No, nor never was.

COOK. Well, there! But who wrote the letters?

EMILY. Mr Forbes.

COOK. Then you *have* been carrying on with Miss Angela's fiangcée?

EMILY. No—the letters wasn't written to me.

COOK. Emily, to whom was they written?

EMILY. To Miss Angela.

COOK. Did you intercept them? Stop them from getting to her?

EMILY. No.

COOK. What, then?

EMILY. I only borrered them!

COOK. Borrered them!

EMILY [*with a wail*]. Yuss. I did so want to have a bit of romance, and Mr Forbes he's always bin my idol. And they looked so nice all tied up with ribbon, and I only kept one or two of 'em a day at a time.

COOK. Oh, then you've bin making a 'abit of this, 'ave you? 'Ow did you find out where they was kept?

EMILY. One morning when Rose was pushed I was 'elping

'er do the rooms. I put away Miss Angela's stocking, and there the packet was, and I saw just a little bit, and I pulled one out, and after that I used ter borrer them regular.

COOK. It's no better than stealing. Of course there's times you can't 'elp seeing a bit of a letter, and no 'arm either if it's left about. But taking them away—no. And then showing them to us as your own! Well, Emily!

[*She turns away disgusted.*

EMILY. It was a bit of pride.

COOK. Pride?

EMILY. Yuss. I know you ain't meant it, Cook, but it's cut me cruel to 'ave you and Ada always a-making fun of me. You don't know how us ugly ones feels over a little thing like that. Mother was the same—she'd give me a push and say, "Go away, you little moral, you won't never get a husband!" It used ter 'urt me awful.

[*Burying her head in her hands, she sits, sobbing.*

COOK. You're a queer customer, Emily, but I don't believe there's much 'arm in you. You're touched, that's all it is, a bit touched.

EMILY [*gratefully*]. Oh, Cook!

COOK. Of course, if I was to do my duty, I should report this to 'her.' But there, I don't hold with telling tales. Servants must 'ang together, or what's ter become of England? Besides that, I see that per'aps things 'ave bin a bit 'ard for you, Emily, what with your face an' all.

EMILY. Oh, Cook!

[EMILY *cries, overwhelmed by* COOK's *kindness.*

COOK. There, don't 'owl. You'd better put those letters back in the drawer. Not under the stockings—she'll 'ave looked there. Come ter think of it, she'll have turned out the 'ole place if there's bin a rumpus. Better put them be'ind the drawer, see?

EMILY. Yes, Cook.

COOK. And don't you ever touch 'em again, Emily.

EMILY. No, Cook.

COOK. I shan't say nothing to Ada about this affair. Ada's so 'igh-minded, she might not see it the same way I do.

EMILY. Thank you very kindly.

COOK. Wait a bit, though. 'Ow are we going to explain about 'Arold? Why he don't write no more nor come ter see yer nor anything? [EMILY *shakes her head.*] Strike her at once, that would. Ada's so sharp.

EMILY. So she is. I suppose I couldn't say as 'ow I'd broken it off?

COOK. Well, 'ardly. You've got to think of something likely.

EMILY. Can I say 'e's broken it off?

COOK. Of course you can. That'll sound quite natril. He's thought it over and broken it off, and mind you act according.

EMILY. I don't like ter think of 'im doing such a thing!

COOK. Now, Emily, when there's no such person as 'Arold! I've no patience with you! Now don't you go filling your 'ead up any more with romances and idols and all them fancy dishes. Roses and snowses and noses are all very well for such as can afford them; you can't. You do your duty and keep your saucepans clean, [*with great condescension*] and per'aps, 'oo knows, I might take you over to see my mother at Putney!

EMILY [*gratefully*]. Oh, Cook!

COOK. So it ain't turned out so badly after all. Sh! Here's Ada! [*To ease the situation she hums a tune.*

[*Enter* ADA, *boiling with indignation. She comes quickly to the table.*

COOK. Why, Ada, what's the matter?

ADA [*holding up the empty dish*]. Here's the savoury! 'Aven't left so much of it as a crumb of toast! Greedy, guzzling pigs, I call 'em!

[*She bangs the dish down.* COOK *and* EMILY *are overwhelmed by the gluttony of their employers.*

CURTAIN

MASTER WAYFARER

A HAPPENING OF LONG AGO

By J. E. Harold Terry

Songs by Arthur Scott Craven

CHARACTERS

The Maid
The Man
The Villain
The Wayfarer

Scene. *The parlour of "The Pigeon Pie"—a wayside hostelry on the road to York.*

Time. 150 *years ago, or more.*

This play was presented for the first time in London at the Apollo Theatre, on December 4, 1917, with the following cast:

The Maid . . .	Miss Elsie Stranack
The Man . . .	Mr Alfred Paumier
The Villain . . .	Mr Eric Cowley
The Wayfarer . .	Mr C. Hayden Coffin

Mr Harold Terry edited *Granta* when he was at Cambridge, and afterward joined the staff of *The Onlooker* and *The British Review*, for which he wrote excellent dramatic criticism. Unlike many dramatic critics, Mr Terry is himself the author of a number of plays, including "Old Rowley, the King," "A King's Ransom," "The Knight of the Garter," and (in collaboration with Mr Lechmere Worrall) "The Man who Stayed at Home."

Mr Terry has had considerable experience on the stage, and was for several years the Honorary Secretary of the Dramatists' Club.

MASTER WAYFARER[1]

SCENE: *The parlour of "The Pigeon Pie."*

A cosy room, oak-panelled, with heavy beams running athwart the ceiling. Hams and bacon hang by hooks from the rafters. There is a big open fireplace and inglenook. The floor is sanded. Upon a rack behind the bar are bottles, quaintly shaped, and shining pewter mugs. Three steps beside the bar lead to an inner room. There is another door, which gives on to the highroad.

When the curtain rises (see p. 7 of vocal score) the room is in complete darkness save for the light cast by the fire, and for the moonbeams which come intermittently through the small latticed window. The wind whistles in the chimney. It is a bleak winter night.

The MAID *enters by the steps from the inner room, bearing a lighted taper. She is in holiday mood, and sings a snatch from some old love-song with a haunting melody. (The first verse of No. 8 in the vocal score.) She is the daughter of the house, and the deity presiding over the bar-parlour. A well-favoured lass, trim and neat, she is. Romance, so she believes, has come to her at last, and it has called forth a coquetry hitherto dormant in her. She is all primitive woman to-night, excited, expectant, restless. She lights*

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

The music for "Master Wayfarer," by Howard Carr, is published by Messrs Samuel French, Ltd. (4*s*).

the candles above the mantel, and upon the table, then goes to the window and gazes out into the night. Reluctantly she draws the curtains, and, passing behind the bar, busies herself with bottles and mugs. The latch of the outer door is lifted (song ceases), and with a glad cry she runs to meet the incomer. The MAN *steps across the threshold, and the joy in her face changes to petulant disappointment. The* MAN *is a stalwart Yorkshire farmer, gruff of speech, and bluff of manner. He wears a heavy riding-coat, with cape, and a three-cornered hat is set upon his unbewigged head. He closes the door, and stamps the snow from off his riding-boots.*

MAID. You!

MAN. Ay, it's me. Belike you was expecting somebody more to your taste.

MAID [*pertly*]. Ask no questions, Master Beamish, and you'll be told no lies. [*Comes C.*

MAN. So it's to be Master Beamish now, is it? [*He laughs in bitter derision as he removes his cloak and places it upon a chair beside the door.*] As ye will, *Miss* Phœbe.

MAID [*demurely*]. I hope I am always respectful to our customers. . . . A mug of ale, Master Beamish?

[*She moves towards the bar.*

MAN. Phœbe, you know I've not come here for drink—though the Lord knows you've done your best to drive me to it! [*He crosses to C., below the table.*

MAID. I would I had succeeded. Trade's very slack to-night.

MAN [*R. C.*]. 'Twill be brisk enough when Jack-a-dandy comes.

MAID [*flaming into anger at once*]. Who mean you by Jack-a-dandy? [*She faces him across the table.*

MAN [*in ponderous imitation of her previous retort to him*]. Ask no questions, Phœbe, and you'll be told no lies.

MAID. Oh! . . . I hate you!

MAN. And I hate Jack-a-dandy! [*He turns aside.*

MAID. Coward!

MAN [*turning again to face her*]. I'm not that, Phœbe.

MAID. You are! Were he here now, would you then call him Jack-a-dandy? Not you! 'Twould be, "I prithee, Master Smeaton." "By your leave, Master Smeaton." 'Twould be——

MAN. 'Twould not!—and well you know it. [*He goes over to her. Pleadingly*] What's come to you, Phœbe? You was glad enough to be my lass afore this peacock came —with his frills, and his laces, and his woman's ways. If he was a better man nor me I wouldn't take it so badly, but——

[PHŒBE *interrupts him with a burst of contemptuous laughter.*

MAID. You as good a man as he! La! 'Tis too funny! . . . For what cause have *you* ever risked your precious skin?

MAN [*darkly*]. Maybe I will risk it in a good cause soon.

MAID [*with fine contempt*]. Ay, this year, next year, sometime, never! But Master Smeaton——!

MAN. Well?

MAID. He has risked everything, lost everything—for his king!

MAN. His king?

MAID. Ay, his king and mine—King James.

MAN. A traitor, eh?

MAID. A hero!

MAN. 'Tis a pretty story!

MAID. And a true one. I had it from his own lips. [*The* MAN *laughs scornfully.*] That is how it comes that he is here in hiding.

MAN. I'll warrant me 'tis true he is in hiding.

MAID [*furiously*]. What do you mean?

MAN. I mean that your pretty gentleman is a pretty rogue, and I can prove it. Prince Charlie! Pshaw! I'll warrant me he's never had closer kinship with Prince Charlie than an empty belly may have given him!

MAID. Coward! Coward! Coward!

MAN. Hard words break no bones, lass.

MAID. I would to God they did! . . . Oh, if I had but Master Smeaton's arm——!

MAN. What then?

MAID. I would thrash you until you cried on me for mercy!

[*The* MAN *is mightily amused. He laughs derisively.*

MAN. Think you Jack-a-dandy's arm would be stout enough for that?

MAID. You shall make test of it.

MAN. I ask no better fortune. When?

MAID. Now—in a few minutes.

MAN. So you *are* expecting him! Good! 'Twill be a meeting after my own heart.

MAID. And mine. Oh, if only he might kill you!

MAN. Phœbe!

MAID. I'll stay no longer in the same room with you. There'll be no customers to-night, until he comes—and then God help you, Master Braggart!

[*Cue for music—No. 2.*

[*She goes up the steps, L. C., and out.*

[*The* MAN *sinks on to the settle of the inglenook, and gazes miserably into the fire. He takes a printed notice from his pocket—a "Hue and Cry" after some criminal—scans it intently, sighs, and thrusts it back into his coat. The wind howls dismally in the chimney. A brief silence is broken by the weird, shrill cry of a Punch-and-Judy man—*

*"What-a-pity—What-a-pity—*What-*a-pity!"* *The* MAN *starts and listens. The cry is repeated, and is followed by a rapping upon the outer door. The* MAN *rises, crosses to the door, and opens it. On the threshold stands a quaint figure—a* WAYFARER, *a travelling showman. His stock-in-trade is carried in a pack suspended from his shoulders. His clothes have at some distant time been rich and costly. Now they are patched and worn, sad relics of themselves. A ragged cloak covers his shoulders. His brown tie-wig calls for the urgent attention of a perruquier. He bows low to the* MAN *with an extravagant affectation of courtesy.*

WAYFARER. Good sir, I thank you. If yonder creaking sign lie not this is a house to which even the sorriest wayfarer is welcome.

MAN. 'Tis an inn, if that's what you mean, and a famous one—"The Pigeon Pie" on the York road.

WAYFARER [*stepping across the threshold*]. Truly a sign to make the mouth water. But, egad, 'twould have a like effect on me were it named "The Cold Beef and Onion" or "The Sheep's Head." I'faith, "The Bread and Cheese" would be by no means amiss. There is much merit in a succulent sign, sir.

MAN [*absently*]. Ay, I've no doubt.

WAYFARER. Fortunate fellow! For myself I have much doubt of everything, save that to-morrow will be much as yesterday, and the day after as the day before, that joy lives short and misery long—and that I am like to starve to death an you close not that door.

[*The* MAN, *whose attention has been riveted upon the roadway, up and down which he has gazed in the hope of observing the approach of his rival, closes the door reluctantly.*

MAN. Ay, 'tis a bleak night. Get you to the fire and warm yourself.

WAYFARER. With all my heart. [*He holds out his hands to the blaze.*] A good fire, sir, you will grant me, is as agreeable a commodity in this life as we are like to find it disagreeable in the next.

MAN [*seating himself disconsolately upon the bench before the table*]. It's right enough for them as is careful not to play with it.

WAYFARER. A most sound observation. [*He observes him shrewdly.*] You have a reason, sir, for that remark.

MAN. Mebbe. [*A pause.*] What was that strange call you gave afore you rapped upon the door ?

WAYFARER. 'Twas the call of my calling, sir ; and withal, the sum of my philosophy.

MAN. I know little o' such things. Dost mean thou art a Punch-and-Judy man?

WAYFARER. You have me, sir—a Punch-and-Judy man. [*He slips the pack from his shoulder.*] What-a-pity—What-a-pity—*What*-a-pity !

MAN. Ay! 'Tis a pity, truly.

[*The* WAYFARER *bows with ironic courtesy.*

WAYFARER. I thank you, sir, for your good opinion.

[*The* MAN *sighs and falls into a gloomy reverie. The* WAYFARER, *having bestowed on him a look that is half mocking, half compassionate, turns again to the fire.*

WAYFARER. A kettle! By all the gods, a kettle on the boil!

MAN. Does that suggest aught to you?

WAYFARER. It does indeed, sir! It suggests lemon and sugar, and the best Jamaica! If my suggestion be to your taste I pray you fall in with it.

MAN. An I can find the bottle, very willingly.

[*He goes to the bar and searches the shelves*

Ah, here it be.

[*He pours the spirit into two glasses, and having added the necessary modicum of sugar and sliced lemon, both of which lie to his hand, he bears them down to the* WAYFARER, *who fills them with water from the kettle.*

WAYFARER. You, sir, I take it, are mine host of this delectable establishment?

MAN. Not so, Master Showman. I serve as penance for having spoken my mind too free.

WAYFARER. Egad, 'tis a penance I could find it in my heart to envy you. . . . I drink to your better acquaintance, Master Penitent.

[*The* MAN *has seated himself upon the bench again, and, absorbed in gloomy thought, pays scant heed to his companion's chatterings. There comes a pause.*

[*The* WAYFARER *lays a hand upon his shoulder.* Good sir, you take your offence too much to heart. . . . You are not sick?

MAN. Of body, no.

WAYFARER. Of mind?

MAN. Of heart!

WAYFARER. Oho! You have been crossed in love, eh? . . . Tut-tut-tut-tut-ter! [*He utters Punch's cry.*] What-a-pity—What-a-pity—*What*-a-pity!

[*The* MAN *shakes his hand from his shoulder impatiently, and moves away to the armchair below the fireplace.*

MAN. I am in no mood for jesting!

WAYFARER. I do not jest, sir. 'Tis no jesting matter. Of my own experience can I say so much, and more. But where's the woman the wide world over that's worth the breaking of a stout heart? [*Cue for music—No.* 3] You are young, Master Dalesman. I am an old campaigner.

[*He sings.*

Youth is a fable, and love an illusion
(I've sounded the depths of them both in my time);
And I'm come to this pleasant and happy conclusion—
That fifty's the age when a man's in his prime!
At twenty he thinks he knows all things worth knowing,
At thirty he doesn't—his pride's had a fall.
At forty in modesty yearly he's growing,
At fifty he knows he knows nothing at all!

So it's good to be fifty,
Full-ripened and mellow.
A happy-go-lucky, light-hearted old fellow!
Who's done with love's folly,
Content to be jolly.
Away melancholy! I'm fifty and wise!
Sing heigho, my hearty!—I'm fifty.

Time was when our sweethearts and better halves ruled us;
(Young love made me trusting, and blind as a bat)
But now when they're charming—'tis they who have schooled us!—
We know that they're wanting a new summer hat.
Take love in the abstract, and wake from these slumbers!
Who loves but one lassie just rides for a fall.
The ladies—God bless them! There's safety in numbers.
Love one, and love fifty. *I've* room for them all!

So it's good to be fifty,
Full-ripened and mellow.
A happy-go-lucky, light-hearted old fellow!
Who's done with love's folly,
Content to be jolly.
Away melancholy! I'm fifty and wise!
Sing heigho, my hearty!—I'm fifty.

[*Encore verse.*

Oh, when we were younger and sadder and thinner,
We swore by the light of the moon and the stars;
But at fifty we swear by a jolly good dinner,
With hot punch to follow, clay pipes and segars.

For love is a *soufflé*, and sweet in the distance :
'Tis food for the young—I was young once myself—
But comfort and ease are the *pièce de résistance*,
When love's little follies are laid on the shelf.

So it's good to be fifty,
Full-ripened and mellow.
A happy-go-lucky, light-hearted old fellow!
Who's done with love's folly,
Content to be jolly.
Away melancholy!—I'm fifty and wise!
Sing heigho, my hearty!—I'm fifty.

[*He drops, laughing, into the armchair above the fireplace.*

MAN. 'Tis plain you've never suffered at the hands of a woman, Master Showman.

WAYFARER. Is it? . . . Ha! [*He laughs bitterly and rises.*] Two little hands, so white and delicate, they thrust me into hell! [*He comes C.*

MAN [*very uncomfortably*]. I ask your pardon, sir—I——

[*He rises and moves towards the* WAYFARER.

WAYFARER. Dost think that I was always as you see me now?—always a Punch-and-Judy man?

MAN. As to that, sir, I cannot say.

WAYFARER. But I can! When I was your age I was an actor. No mere strolling mummer, but the peer of Garrick and of Sheridan—names to conjure with!

MAN. Conjurers were they?

[*He returns to the chair below the fireplace.*

WAYFARER. God forbid! They are the greatest actors of our age! Surely you have heard of David Garrick?

MAN. No, I can't say that I have.

WAYFARER. And such is fame! No matter. [*He seats himself on bench, C.*] I was doing well. Had money saved—an hundred guineas and more. I was married, and I loved

my wife. We had a daughter, a little prattling mite of four years old, as dear to me as life. Such was the first act of my tragedy. 'Twas set in Paradise.

MAN. How comes it then—— ?

WAYFARER. The devil crept into my Paradise—the devil dressed as a smart gentleman. He stole my Molly from me while I slept, and she took with her all my savings, and my little girl. And I awoke in hell. That was the second act. The third was mainly—this. [*He lifts his glass.*] So exit " the greatest actor of his day," enter the Punch-and-Judy man!

MAN. My story, too, concerns the devil dressed as a smart gentleman. [*Moves to C.*

WAYFARER. Ay, 'tis the theme of most love-tragedies.

MAN. 'Tis nigh a twelvemonth gone since my lass and me plighted our troths. I am a dalesman, bred and born, farming the land my fathers farmed. We're simple folk, but we're honest, and we're comfortable; and 'twas thought a rare thing for the lass whose mother kept "The Pigeon Pie" that she should have the chance to wed a Beamish. . . . 'Twas fixed we should be wed a sennight hence. But now——

[*He chokes back the lump that rises in his throat.*

WAYFARER. That is the devil's cue to enter, eh?

MAN. Ay, and as damned a rogue as ever soiled shoe-leather! Look you here, Master Showman, what say you to this?

[*He takes the "Hue and Cry" from his pocket, and spreads it out on the table before the* WAYFARER.

WAYFARER. A "Hue and Cry"! [*He sits in chair R. of table and cons the paper.*] Is this the man?

MAN [*seated on bench, C.*]. My life on't!

WAYFARER [*reading from the bill*]. " A notorious utterer of

coined money—of dainty manners and elaborate dress—passes for a person of position—grey eyes—full colour—a triangular scar upon his forehead concealed by his wig. . . ." H'm! How accounts he for his presence in this benighted spot?

MAN [*with fine scorn*]. Tch! He has won all the women's foolish hearts by giving out that he is a fugitive from Culloden, one of Prince Charlie's noblemen! Oh, he tells wondrous tales of Falkirk and of Prestonpans! You shall hear for yourself, and judge accordingly.

WAYFARER. When?

MAN. Now—to-night.

WAYFARER. Does he come here?

MAN. Ay, any minute now. Damn his black heart!

[*He rises and moves L. C.*

WAYFARER. Egad, then we shall see some sport! I'm for you, Master Dalesman. Count me on your side.

[*He holds out his hand. The* MAN *grasps it warmly.*

MAN. I thank you. . . . Ah!

[*The exclamation is evoked by the sound of the* MAID's *voice crooning the song that she was singing when the curtain rose. The* WAYFARER *stands rigid, a strange look upon his face.*

WAYFARER. Who sings?

MAN. My lass. [*He sighs deeply and adds as he moves over to the fire.*] My lass that was.

WAYFARER. 'Tis an uncommon air.

MAN. Ay, and like to be. She's always singing it, and many's the time she's told me how 'twas a fancy of her father, who died when she was but a little 'un.

WAYFARER [*in intense excitement—almost shouting*]. What say you? Have you a picture of her—this lass of yours?

MAN. Ay—but what's made thee so excited, Master Showman?

WAYFARER. Give it to me! Let me see it! [*As the* MAN *fumbles with a chain about his neck*] Oh, make haste!

MAN. 'Tis no new picture, but 'twas the only one she had to give me. 'Twas painted when she was but a toddlin' mite. Yet 'tis like her.

[*He opens a locket and passes it to the* WAYFARER, *whose face grows radiant at sight of it. He is oblivious of the presence of the* MAN, *who regards him with eyes wide with wonder.*

WAYFARER. Phœbe! Little Phœbe!

[*He presses the portrait to his lips.*

MAN. Phœbe! How knew you her name was Phœbe?

WAYFARER [*suddenly recalled to earth—hesitates, and sinks on to the bench*]. I—— Oh, ask me no questions now, good Master Dalesman, I beg of you!

MAN. But—— [*His slow brain begins to revolve.*] Ah! Now I do bethink me——!

WAYFARER [*with energy*]. Bethink you of nothing but how best we may entrap the rogue who would rob you of your happiness. Master Dalesman, your true-love shall be restored to your arms this night [*cue for music—No.* 4], or I am fit for nothing save to be that I am—a Punch-and-Judy man. . . . Sh!

[*He lays a finger on his lips as the latch of the outer door lifts and the door itself opens to admit the* VILLAIN. *A good-looking fellow is he, elaborately dressed. He affects a powdered wig, and beauty patch, and grasps his sword so that his black cloak falls in graceful folds. He enters the room with confidence, and hardly has he closed the door before the* MAID *re-enters from the inner room, L. C. Obviously she has been listening for the sound of his coming, and as elaborate as his sweeping bow is the curtsy with which she greets him.*

[*The* WAYFARER *(D. S. L.) keeps his eyes fixed on her. There is a great yearning in them. As the play proceeds so he gazes long and earnestly upon her whenever he can do so unperceived by her. The* MAN *observes this and judges accordingly.*

VILLAIN [*lifting her hand to his lips*]. Sweet mistress, I ask your pardon that I am late for our tryst. This weather, and the King's business——

MAID. That had excused you had you not come at all. But I am glad that you have come—as also, methinks, is there some one who is not.

[*Moves down from door to C. above table.*

[*She looks with contempt at the* MAN. *He springs to his feet with angry exclamation, eager to give the lie to her insinuation. The* WAYFARER, *however, intervenes.*

WAYFARER. Nay, lady, not so. Yon gentleman and I are grown weary of our own company. If my lord will but condescend to join us——

[*A bow and a wave of his hand serve for completion of his sentence.*

VILLAIN [*well pleased and laughingly*]. My lord, eh? How comes it, sir, that you are able to discern my rank?

WAYFARER. Good breeding, sir, is even as murder—it will out!

VILLAIN. Happily answered. 'Twill afford me pleasure, sir, if *you* will drink with *me*. [*He swaggers down to the table, and divests himself of his cloak.*] Ah, Master Beamish, good even to you.

MAN [*sullenly*]. Good even. [*He sits in the armchair below the fire.*]

VILLAIN. You will join us?

[*The* MAN *is about to refuse when he catches the* WAYFARER'S *eye. The latter signals to him to accept.*

MAN [*reluctantly*]. I thank you.

VILLAIN. What shall it be?

WAYFARER. An you inquire of me, my lord, Jamaica, hot, with sugar and a slice of lemon.

VILLAIN. An inspiration! You, Master Beamish?

MAN. I'm for the same.

VILLAIN. Then, good Mistress Phœbe, are we all three of a mind. Wilt serve us?

MAID. As generously as you have served our king.

[*She moves up to the bar.*

MAN. Then will you serve us from an empty bottle.

VILLAIN [*quick to take offence*]. What mean you, sir?

WAYFARER [*swift and suave*]. 'Tis very plain, my lord. Our friend would indicate that, having given of your all unto your king, now you have no more left to give.

[*He gives the* MAN *a warning kick.*

VILLAIN. I had not thought him capable of so pretty a compliment.

MAID. Nor have I found him so.

[*She hands round the tankards, giving the first to the* MAN, *the second to the* WAYFARER, *and the third to the* VILLAIN, *and then proceeds to fill them in the same order from the kettle, which she fetches from the hob.*

WAYFARER. Ah, then you know him not. I'faith, never have I met with a more subtle wit. 'Twas a rare thought of his to compare your lordship with an empty bottle.

VILLAIN. Upon my life I see it not. I should be hard put to it to conceive of anything more useless.

WAYFARER. Nay, on the contrary, my lord. Has not an empty bottle done its duty once? Is it not ready to do the like again? [*He lifts his glass.*] Your health, my lord!

VILLAIN [*clinking glasses with him*]. And yours, good Master Wayfarer. [*He turns to the* MAN.] Methinks,

Master Beamish, you are fortunate in your interpreter. He has a rare grasp of the Yorkshire idiom!

[*The* MAID *replaces the kettle on the hob.*

MAN. 'Twill serve for them as likes not the taste o' plain speech.

VILLAIN. It would seem, sir, that you are trying to pick a quarrel with me.

WAYFARER. Nay, nay! You are too hasty, my lord. What man of spirit can stomach plain food or a plain wench? None! Then, why, by that same token, should he have a taste for plain speech?

MAID. I know not about a plain wench. But plain food is healthy, and so is plain speech.

MAN. Well spoken, Phœbe! That's the spirit o' the dales.

MAID. I did not address you, Master Beamish. Plain speech, methinks, were little suited to *your* stomach.

MAN [*with determination*]. Master Smeaton, I have drunk with you. I would discharge the debt. Wilt drink with me?

VILLAIN [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Since you put it so prettily, sir——

MAN [*to* WAYFARER]. Art o' the same mind?

WAYFARER [*hesitating*]. I thank you, Master Beamish, but——

MAID. An you continue your journeying to-night, sir, you will need something to keep out the cold. 'Tis a bitter winter.

WAYFARER [*looking regretfully into his empty glass*]. Ay, verily, 'tis true that one swallow does not make a summer.

[*He holds out his tankard to her. The* MAID *takes it with the two other tankards up to the bar, where she refills them.*

VILLAIN [*laughing*]. An your wit could keep you warm, sir, you would have small need of other covering. Do you journey far?

WAYFARER. To York, or as nigh as I can come to it.

VILLAIN. But why such haste?

WAYFARER. 'Tis the fair the day after to-morrow.

[*He moves over to the chair above the fireplace and proceeds to unstrap the box that he brought in with him.*

MAID [*with quick interest—moving down to him*]. You are a showman, then?

WAYFARER. An insignificant one, fair mistress—a Punch-and-Judy man. [*He displays his dolls.*

VILLAIN. A Punch-and-Judy man! Egad, then you shall provide us with an entertainment. [*The* MAID *takes the kettle from the hob and fills up the tankards that she has left upon the counter of the bar.*] Out with your puppets, Master Showman! [*He sweeps aside the* WAYFARER'S *demur.*] I'll pay you well for it.

WAYFARER. An you will pay me as well, my lord, I can entertain you better and at less pains to myself. I am a noted teller of right merry tales. A singer, withal, and no mean dancer. [*He skips lightly D. S. R.*] How shall I please you best, my noble lord?

VILLAIN. So be that you *do* entertain us, I will leave the manner of our entertaining to you.

[*The* MAID *comes down with the tankards to above table, R.*

WAYFARER. How say you, sweet mistress?

MAID [*as she hands his drink to him*]. I love best a ballad.

WAYFARER. A ballad be it. You shall have my latest. 'Tis suited to all tastes, for 'tis spiced with liquor for my lord, and with love for my lady.

[*The* VILLAIN *takes a tankard from the tray that the*

MAID *offers to him. She moves down L. C. and gives the one remaining to the* MAN.

MAN. Give us first a taste of your acting, Master Showman.

VILLAIN [*insolently incredulous*]. Canst act?

[*He swaggers to C. above the table.*

WAYFARER. It has been said of me at Drury Lane that I can.

MAID [*with excitement*]. Then do, I prithee, sir! I have never seen an actor.

[*She kneels on the chair R. of the table, facing him.*

VILLAIN [*with lazy contempt*]. Nor are you like to now —unless so be that Garrick has turned Punch-and-Judy man.

WAYFARER. Stranger things than that have happened, sir. I have seen a common rogue actor enough to pass muster as a lord! Now you shall see, if not Garrick turned Punch-and-Judy man, at least a Punch-and-Judy man turned Garrick. [*Cue for music—No.* 5.

[*The* MAID *crosses to the chair L. of the table, the* VILLAIN *to the chair above the fireplace. The* WAYFARER *sings, addressing himself to the* VILLAIN.

For one nimble little shilling
On a word from you I'm willing
To enact a drama thrilling,
  Or the lightest light burlesque.
I'm a player ripe and mellow,
Quite a manysided fellow—
From a smothering Othello
  To a mountebank grotesque.

Without bounce or puff or frilling,
From Macbeth intent on killing,
Or your Shylock set on spilling
  Christian blood, to red-nosed clown.

Let me state the simple fact, sir.
There's no part I *couldn't* act, sir,
If you'd change the nimble shilling
To a nimbler half a crown.

If as Romeo you'd " shoo " me,
Or as Benedick you'd " boo " me,
(As a Hamlet dark and gloomy,
I am equally at home)
Or a noble-hearted hero,
Or a fat and foolish Pierrot,
Or an evil-minded Nero,
Fiddling to a burning Rome—
All these parts I would enact, sir,
As in town to houses packed, sir,
With the greatest skill and tact, sir,
For one golden guinea down.

VILLAIN. Well, a guinea agreed to! Now then, for a taste of your quality.

WAYFARER. 'Tis all impromptu, my lord; impromptu drama, an it please you!

[*The* WAYFARER *declaims to music.*

Curtain rises! Act one! We discover,
In a sweet country lane,
A young love-stricken swain.

[*To the* MAN.

(No desire to offend—
Any name would suffice—
'Tis impromptu, my friend,
And your name sounds so nice) . . .
John Beamish, a young yeoman lover;
Honest John, stolid, staid;
Then a sweet little maid.

[*To the* MAID.

With as many rare dimples as swains, I'm afraid.
Humbly he meets her,

Tenderly greets her,
Ardently, eagerly, softly entreats her.
But she—naughty puss!—straightaway from him trips,
With sweet roguish eyes, and a smile on her lips:
[*He sings.*
Tra, la, la, la! No, I fear you won't do,
For I love a young lordling much better than you.
Tra, la, la, la! Good day!
[*He dances a few steps with the* MAID, *who finishes in chair R. of table, and then proceeds.*
Curtain rises! Act two! We discover
In the same country lane
A young turkey-cock vain—
[*To the* VILLAIN.
With ruffle and sword,
And a cock-a-hoop air,
(You'll excuse me, my lord,
But of fine clothes beware!)
No man for a country maid's lover!
Then the same little jade? . . .
[*To the* MAID—*holding her tenderly.*
Nay, a sweet little maid,
But with much too much faith in his word, I'm afraid!
Proudly he meets her,
Laughingly greets her,
Daintily, lazily, lightly entreats her.
But she—prudent maid!—straightaway from him trips,
With a flash in her eyes, and no smile on her lips!
[*He sings.*
Fie, tra, la, la! You are no lordling true,
Of spurious coinage, my lord—Lord knows who!
Tra, la, la, la, la! Good-bye!

[*Straightway he breaks into a dance, and, as before, beckons the* MAID *to be his partner. She joins him with a zest. Every now and again his steps falter as his thoughts stray from the dance to the girl who faces him. She observes this and rallies him merrily: "How now, Master Showman? You*

are out of step!" or "Good sir, you lag: Quicker! Quicker!" The dance ends and she sinks into the chair R. of table, laughing delightedly. The MAN's *face also is aglow with the delight that the* WAYFARER's *palpable thrusts at his enemy have given him. The* MAID *applauds with enthusiasm; the* VILLAIN *perfunctorily. He regards the* WAYFARER, *who has collapsed into the chair L. of the table, suspiciously from under knitted brows.*

MAN. A brave drama, bravely enacted. Say you not so, Master Smeaton?

VILLAIN [*with elaborate affectation of indifference*]. 'Twas acted passably enough, but it lacked point. [*To* WAYFARER] However, here's for your pains.

[*He tosses the* WAYFARER *a coin. The latter catches it and regards it dubiously.*

WAYFARER. Was not my song well sung, my lord?

VILLAIN. I have no fault to find with it.

WAYFARER. Then surely it ill becomes a noble lord to reward a good ballad with bad money.

[*General excitement. The* VILLAIN *rises angrily from his chair. Unnoticed by him, his purse slips from his knee to the floor. The* MAN *picks it up, and crosses with it to the back of the table.*

VILLAIN. How now, sir? You are insolent!

[*The* WAYFARER *tosses the coin upon the table.*

WAYFARER [*above the table, C.*]. An I spoke as falsely as that coin rings, then were I insolent indeed, my lord!

[*The* MAID *picks up the coin, and examines it.*

MAID [*R. of the table*]. He is right. 'Tis as false a guinea as ever I clapped eyes on.

[*All eyes are turned upon the* VILLAIN. *He laughs uneasily. The* MAN *works his way towards the outer door, barring possibility of egress.*

VILLAIN [*taking the coin from the* MAID]. The devil fly away with the scoundrel who palmed it off on me!

[*He perceives his purse lying upon the table, and makes a quick movement to regain possession of it. The* WAYFARER *forestalls him, and empties its contents on to the boards. The coins fall with a metallic tinkle that proclaims them counterfeit. The* VILLAIN *endeavours to conceal his alarm behind a mask of injured innocence. He exclaims in the tone of one reluctant to admit himself defrauded.*

Are those *all* false, then?

[*The* MAID *examines the money.*

MAID. Ay, false as Judas—every one of them! How came you by them?

WAYFARER. Mayhappen I can answer that.

VILLAIN. You! How in the name of Satan——?

WAYFARER. As I tramped hitherward this afternoon, it chanced that I fell in with two other travellers bound the same way as I.

VILLAIN. Well?

WAYFARER. We talked of this and that, upon indifferent topics, till finally they told me of their quest.

VILLAIN. Which was?

WAYFARER. The discovery of a most notorious rogue, my lord, an utterer of coined money.

MAID. And they expect to find him in these parts?

WAYFARER. It would appear that they have *certain* information of him—how he has lain concealed here or hereabout for nigh a twelvemonth past.

MAID [*sorely perturbed*]. Dost hear that, John?—er—Master Beamish?

MAN [*gruffly*]. Ay, I hear.

[*The* VILLAIN *tries to conceal his nervousness, and to impart a casual note to his voice as he inquires:*

VILLAIN. Didst discover who they were—these fellow-travellers?

WAYFARER. Ay, they were Bow Street runners, both of them. I saw their warrant for the apprehension of this rogue.

VILLAIN. Their warrant! An you speak truly, then must I fly these parts at once.

[*The* MAN *rattles the handle of the door, and panic seizes the* VILLAIN.

What's that?

MAN. The catch fell, that is all. Have no fear, Master Smeaton, I'm here to see that none gets in—or out.

VILLAIN [*with a sigh of relief*]. Ah!

[*The* MAN *settles himself more firmly against the door.*

[*The* WAYFARER *laughs as though at a good jest.*

WAYFARER. You fly, my lord! Ha, ha! A merry jest! 'Tis like *you* would be taken for a rogue!

VILLAIN. You do not understand. I am a refugee, a fugitive from Culloden. If they get wind of my presence here, they—— Tell me!—this swindler?—— Did the runners say aught of his appearance?—how he looked, and what he wore?

WAYFARER. Nay; but I have it all set forth upon a bill they gave to me. [*He fishes in his pocket and brings forth the "Hue and Cry."*] Belike 'twill help you to identify him.

VILLAIN. Surely it will.

[*He takes it from him with trembling fingers and spreads it upon the table before him. The* WAYFARER, *leaning over his shoulder, reads it also.*

WAYFARER. Egad, my lord, but this ruffian must possess a strange likeness to yourself! [*Cue for music—No. 6. Begin softly and continue throughout scene.*]

[*The* VILLAIN *starts nervously.*

"Of dainty manners and elaborate dress." None would

deny you those two attributes. "A full colour"—such is yours. "Grey eyes"——

VILLAIN [*angrily*]. Nay, mine are green! I like not this fooling, Master Mummer.

WAYFARER. I have meant no offence, my lord, but so strange a resemblance has made me fear lest this scoundrel should be personating yourself.

MAID. Oh, that were terrible! Then might the runners apprehend you by mistake for him!

WAYFARER. There lies no cause for fear; for if that chanced then could they easily be proven wrong.

MAID. How so?

WAYFARER. It is set forth here that the person they are in search of possesses a triangular scar upon his forehead that he conceals beneath his wig. My lord will prove, by removing his *perruque*, that there the resemblance between him and this rascal ends.

VILLAIN [*furiously*]. I shall do no such thing!

WAYFARER. Why not, my lord?—unless so be that you are bald.

VILLAIN. I like not your humour, Master Showman. Too quick a wit leads ofttimes to the stocks!

WAYFARER [*beckoning the* MAN *to draw nearer*]. As too slow a one, my lord, leads ofttimes to the gallows!

[*He flicks the* VILLAIN's *wig from his head. The scar upon his forehead is revealed.*

MAID. Good God!
MAN. 'Tis there!—the scar!

[*The music swells momentarily louder. The* MAID *shrinks back in horror, D. S. R. The* VILLAIN *springs to his feet, overturning his chair. His sword leaps from its scabbard, and in that same instant his wrist is caught in a firm grip by the* MAN (*C.*). *A moment's struggle and the weapon*

is wrenched from his fingers, and flung across the room. The MAID *stands as one turned to stone.*

WAYFARER [*D. S. L., mockingly*]. A second Culloden, methinks, my lord! [*He picks up the fallen sword.*] I accept your token of surrender.

MAN [*to the* MAID]. Now, lass, what shall we do with him? Is he to have a run for his money?

WAYFARER. If the one be as bad as the other, methinks it will avail him little!

MAID. I care not what you do with him so be that you remember this—that he has kissed me—*kissed* me!

[*Shaken by sobs of anger and injured pride, she runs from the room. The* MAN *gives a growl of rage.*

MAN. You dog! Put up your fists! Put 'em up, I say!

VILLAIN [*aghast*]. What are you going to do?

MAN. I'm going to spoil your lips for kissing more!

VILLAIN. Nay; hand me over to the runners an you will, but disfigure me not, good sir, I beg of you.

[*The* WAYFARER *stands with one foot on the table, the other on the chair L. of it, waving aloft the* VILLAIN'S *sword.*

WAYFARER. An I had stage-managed such a scene, the villain had begged pardon on his knees.

VILLAIN. And so I will. [*He drops on to his knees.*] Good sir, you cannot strike a man who will not lift a finger in his own defence!

MAN. You cur!

WAYFARER. He speaks truly, Master Dalesman. You cannot soil your fingers by touching pitch like that.

MAN. What's to be done with him?

WAYFARER. What does one do with refuse but fling it out of the window?

[*He steps over to the window, R., and throws it wide.*

The music swells. The MAN *picks up the* VILLAIN, *struggling and protesting, in his arms, and carries him to the window, outside of which he pitches him without further ado.*

WAYFARER. A mighty cast! . . . Egad, but he's shot clean through yonder snowdrift! And his language! Help me to close the window, Master Dalesman, lest our ears be contaminated! [*He bursts into a roar of hearty laughter.*] 'Faith, never have I taken part in so pretty a comedy!

[*The music ceases.*

MAN. Oh, Master Showman, tell me, how comes it that a woman can be deceived by such a sorry thing as that?

[*He crosses to the bench, C., and sits.*

WAYFARER. 'Tis woman's mission in life to be deceived. An it were not, egad, we should be overrun by bachelors!

MAN. Do you not smart to think that that has kissed our Phœbe? [*Momentarily the* WAYFARER *is taken aback.*

WAYFARER. *Our——!* [*He recovers himself swiftly.*] Your pardon, sir. I had forgot the—er—[*he recalls the phrase employed previously by the* VILLAIN]—the Yorkshire idiom!

MAN [*stolidly insistent*]. She is your daughter!

[*There comes a pause. The* WAYFARER *replies with difficulty.*

WAYFARER. I have no daughter.

MAN. It may be woman's mission in life to be deceived, good Master Showman. It is not mine. Have I not marked with what hungry eyes you have regarded her from the moment that she came into the room? Then, too, the likeness—for she *is* like you—— How can you tell me that you have no daughter?

WAYFARER [*deeply moved*]. No, no, you are mistaken, sir, I do assure you.

MAN. Nay, I am not mistaken. Phœbe and her mother

have not lived here all their lives as I have. They came one summer's night, no one knew whence. They bought this inn—bought it, I doubt not, with your savings that you told me of—and, ever since their coming, this little tune, strange to these parts, has haunted my ears.

[*He rises and moves L., making attempt to hum the song that the* MAID *was singing when the curtain rose. The* WAYFARER *interrupts him.*

WAYFARER. Nay, you have it wrong. [*Cue for music—No.* 6A.] 'Tis thus that it should go.

[*He sings the refrain anew, and breaks down as he reaches the last bar.*

MAN. And you will still tell me you are not her father, you who writ that tune?

WAYFARER [*in chair R. of table*]. Master Dalesman, I am a Punch-and-Judy man.

MAN. What of it?

WAYFARER. Think you she, who believes her father to be among the saints, would be rejoiced to find him resurrected thus? . . . You have no answer. . . . She dreams of me, perchance. Perchance she prays for me. 'Tis more to my liking, Master Dalesman, to be a sweet memory than an unsavoury fact.

MAN. But this inn? 'Tis yours by right. 'Twas purchased with your money, and 'tis a fair property.

WAYFARER. An I have any claim upon it, then do I gladly surrender it to you to be your marriage portion. All that I ask of you in fair exchange is this—— [*He displays the locket.*] Wilt give it to me?

MAN. With all my heart.

WAYFARER. And some day when she shall ask of you what has become of it, mayhappen you can tell her without hurting her. . . . Now, get you to Phœbe, lad, and stay her tears with kisses. This is the moment when you shall

get straight to her heart. God bless you, lad. Take care of her.

MAN. You are not going?

WAYFARER. Not at this moment. I would see her again —just once—before I go. [*Cue for music—No.* 7.] Tell her that.

[*The* MAN *goes out, L. C.*

[*The* WAYFARER *picks up his pack from the floor, slips its straps over his shoulder, and then, seating himself upon the settle before the fire, gazes wistfully into the flames.*

[*He sings.*

Life's a Punch-and-Judy show,
We the puppets inside the box—
Divers kicks and plenteous knocks,
And pence to spur ambition.
Fate, with his plots to be revealed,
Stands, like the Showman, wholly concealed,
And to his will poor Punch must yield,
And Judy own submission!
Fate pulls the strings.
Poor painted things!
What puppet dare gainsay him?
He has sole voice.
Their only choice
Is straightway to obey him!
(What a pity!)—to obey him!

[*He crosses to the window R. and, pulling aside the curtain, looks out into the night.*

Life's a Punch-and-Judy show,
O'er the rivers, and dales and downs,
Country roads and marketing towns,
Old Fate, the Showman, takes us.
Once brand-new puppets, bright in youth,
Battered, and bruised, and broken!—Forsooth,
When worn out quite—oh, sorry truth!—
'Tis then the Showman breaks us!

[*He sinks into the chair R. of the table.*

Fate cuts the strings,
Poor broken things!—
Gently in youth so guarded—
Now worn and old,
Their sad tale told,
All heartlessly discarded!
(What a pity!)—discarded!

[*The* MAID *and the* MAN *re-enter L. C.* (*to gay music*). *His arms are about her, and a radiant happiness shines from the eyes of both of them. They come down L. of the table.*

MAID. John tells me that you are going, Master Wayfarer. But, on such a night as this, and after the great service you have rendered us, it must not be. There is room and to spare in the inn.

WAYFARER [*R. C.*]. I thank you for your kind thought of me. But I must needs press onwards. The fair opens in York the day after to-morrow, and if I am not there betimes some other will have taken my pitch, and in vain shall I cry, "What-a-pity—What-a-pity—*What*-a-pity!"

MAID. Is there no service, then, that we can render you?

WAYFARER. There is a favour I would ask of you.

MAID. 'Tis granted, sir, before you ask it, an it be in my power to perform.

WAYFARER. 'Tis but a simple thing—that you will sing to me that song that—that—— [*Cue for music—No.* 8.

[*His voice breaks.*

[*The* MAN *comes to his rescue.*

MAN [*gently*]. The song your father writ.

[*The* MAID *looks astonished, but responds unquestioningly:*

MAID. Why—why, surely.

[*She sings, and, as the song proceeds, she is so carried*

away by its message that she forgets all about the WAYFARER, *and sings only to her lover. The old man watches them with that same intense yearning in his eyes that the* MAN *has remarked previously.*

[*Seeing that he is forgotten, he takes his cloak from the chair, and slips it over his arm. Noiselessly he lifts the latch of the door, and stands awhile in the opening, gazing from the pictured face in the locket to the girl who has forgotten his very existence. He lifts the locket to his lips, and then, quite suddenly, he disappears into the night.*

Hush-a-bye! Lullaby!
Daughter of mine.
I cannot bring to you
Night stars ashine.
I cannot rake you
The moon from above,
Though you have all
The great wealth of my love.

Hush-a-bye! Lullaby!
Down from the moon,
Fairies will bring
A great gift to you soon.
If it be love
To your heart that would roam,
Sweetly and tenderly
Welcome it home.[1]

[*The music continues through the dialogue to the fall of the curtain.*

MAID [*her eyes looking up into the* MAN's]. Ah, my dear!

[*She is about to lay her head upon his shoulder when the* MAN *checks her by a gesture intimating that they are not alone.*

[1] The words of the "Lullaby" are by Douglas Furber.

MAID [*in a whisper*]. Oh, I had quite forgot. [*She turns about to face the* WAYFARER.] Why, where is he ?

MAN [*crossing to the open door*]. We had both of us forgot. 'Twas so he wished it. He has passed out of this door and out of our lives. We shall never see the Punch-and-Judy man again. [*A pause.*] Listen!

[*Out of the darkness and from the distance comes Punch's mocking cry—"What-a-pity—What-a-pity—*What-*a-pity!*"

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE POT OF BROTH

By W. B. Yeats

CHARACTERS

John Coneely, *an elderly man*
Sibby Coneely, *a young or middle-aged woman*
A Tramp

W. B. Yeats—who happens to be a Doctor of Literature and of Law, as well as a Senator of the Irish Free State—is one of the most conspicuous figures in Ireland, and in 1923 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. His genius is amazingly versatile, and he has established himself as a poet, a playwright (in prose and verse), and an essayist of great charm. His "Countess Cathleen" was produced when he was twenty-seven years of age, and "The Celtic Twilight" appeared a year later. All his work is distinguished by poetic imagination and restrained emotion.

"The Pot of Broth" was the first comedy in dialect, and the author remarks concerning its earlier history: "In some country village an audience of farmers once received it in stony silence, and at the fall of the curtain a farmer stood up and said that nobody there had ever seen a play. Then Mr William Fay explained what a play was, and the farmer asked that it might be performed again, and at the second performance there was much laughter and cheers."

The reader who desires to know Mr Yeats in a different mood should study "Cathleen ni Hoolihan" or "The Land of Heart's Desire."

THE POT OF BROTH[1]

SCENE: *A cottage kitchen. Fire on the hearth; table with cabbage, onions, a plate of meal, etc. Half-open door. A* TRAMP *enters, looks about.*

TRAMP. What sort are the people of this house, I wonder? Was it a good place for me to come to look for my dinner, I wonder? What's in that big pot? [*Lifts cover.*] Nothing at all! What's in the little pot? [*Lifts cover.*] Nothing at all! What's in that bottle, I wonder? [*Takes it up excitedly and tastes.*] Milk! Milk in a bottle! I wonder they wouldn't afford a tin can to milk the cow into! Not much chance for a poor man to make a living here. What's in that chest? [*Kneels and tries to lift cover.*] Locked! [*Smells at the keyhole.*] There's a good smell—there must be a still not far off.

[*Gets up and sits on chest. A noise heard outside, shouts, footsteps, and loud frightened cackling.*

TRAMP. What in the earthly world is going on outside? Anyone would think it was the Fiannta-h-Eireann at their hunting!

SIBBY'S VOICE. Stop the gap, let you stop the gap, John. Stop that old schemer of a hen flying up on the thatch like as if she was an eagle!

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

JOHN'S VOICE. What can I do, Sibby? I all to had my hand upon her when she flew away!

SIBBY'S VOICE. She's out into the garden! Follow after her! She has the wide world before her now.

TRAMP. Sibby he called her. I wonder is it Sibby Coneely's house I am in? If that's so it's a bad chance I have of going out heavier than I came in. I often heard of her, a regular slave-driver that would starve the rats. A niggard with her eyes on kippeens, that would skin a flea for its hide! It was the bad luck of the world brought me here, and not a house or a village between this and Tubber. And it isn't much I have left to bring me on there. [*Begins emptying out his pockets on the chest.*] There's my pipe and not a grain to fill it with! There's my handkerchief I got at the coronation dinner! There's my knife and nothing left of it but the handle. [*Shakes his pocket out.*] And there's a crust of the last dinner I got, and the last I'm likely to get till to-morrow. That's all I have in the world unless the stone I picked up to pelt at that yelping dog a while ago. [*Takes stone out of pocket and tosses it up and down.*] In the time long ago I usen't to have much trouble to find a dinner, getting over the old women and getting round the young ones! I remember the time I met the old minister on the path and sold him his own flock of turkeys. My wits used to fill my stomach then, but I'm afraid they're going from me now with all the hardship I went through.

[*Cackling heard again and cries.*

SIBBY'S VOICE. Catch her, she's round the bush! Put your hands in the nettles, don't be daunted!

[*A choked cackle and prolonged screech.*

TRAMP. There's a dinner for somebody, anyway. That it may be for myself! How will I come round her, I wonder? There is no more pity in her heart than there's

a soul in a dog. If all the saints were standing barefoot before her she'd bid them to call another day. It's myself I have to trust to now, and my share of talk. [*Looks at the stone.*] I know what I'll do, I know what the tinker did with a stone, and I'm as good a man as he is, anyway. [*He jumps up and waves the stone over his head.*] Now, Sibby! If I don't do it one way I'll do it another. My wits against the world!

"There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's cabbage for me
And broth for you,
And beef for Jack the journeyman.

I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead
And a stone at your head,
So as I'd marry poor Jack the journeyman."

JOHN'S VOICE [*outside*]. Bring it in, bring it in, Sibby. You'll be late with the priest's dinner.

SIBBY'S VOICE. Can't you wait a minute till I'll draw it?

[*Enter* JOHN.

JOHN. I didn't know there was anyone in the house.

TRAMP. It's only this minute I came in, tired with the length of the road I am, and fasting since morning.

JOHN [*begins groping among the pots and pans*]. I'll see can I find anything here for you. . . . I don't see much . . . maybe there's something in the chest.

[*He takes key from a hiding-place at back of hearth, opens chest, takes out bottle, takes out a ham-bone, and is cutting a bit from it when* SIBBY *enters,*

carrying chicken by the neck. JOHN *drops the ham-bone on a bench.*

SIBBY. Hurry now, John, after all the time you have wasted. Why didn't you steal up on the old hen that time she was scratching in the dust?

JOHN. Sure I thought one of the chickens would be the tenderest.

SIBBY. Cock you up with tenderness! All the expense I'm put to! My grand hen I've been feeding these five years! Wouldn't that have been enough to part with? Indeed I wouldn't have thought of parting with her itself, but she had got tired of laying since Easter.

JOHN. Well, I thought we ought to give his Reverence something that would have a little good in it.

SIBBY. What does the age of it matter? A hen's a hen when it's on the table. [*Sitting down to pluck chicken*] Why couldn't the Kernans have given the priest his dinner the way they always do? What did it matter their mother's brother to have died? It is an excuse they had made up to put the expense of the dinner on me.

JOHN. Well, I hope you have a good bit of bacon to put in the pot along with the chicken.

SIBBY. Let me alone. The taste of meat on the knife is all that high-up people like the clergy care for, nice genteel people, no way greedy like potato-diggers or harvest-men.

JOHN. Well, I never saw the man, gentle or simple, wouldn't be glad of his fill of bacon and he hungry.

SIBBY. Let me alone, I'll show the Kernans what I can do. I have what is better than bacon, a nice bit of a ham I am keeping in the chest this good while, thinking we might want it for company. [*She catches sight of* TRAMP *and calls out.*] Who is there? A beggar-man is it? Then you may quit this house if you please. We have nothing for you. [*She gets up and opens the door.*

TRAMP [*comes forward*]. It is a mistake you are making, ma'am, it is not asking anything I am. It is giving I am more used to. I was never in a house yet, but there would be a welcome for me in it again.

SIBBY. Well, you have the appearance of a beggar, and if it isn't begging you are what way do you make your living?

TRAMP. If I was a beggar, ma'am, it is to common people I would be going and not to a nice grand woman like yourself, that is only used to be talking with high-up noble people.

SIBBY. Well, what is it you are asking? If it's a bit to eat you want, I can't give it to you, for I have company coming that will clear all before them.

TRAMP. Is it me ask anything to eat? [*Holds up stone.*] I have here what is better than beef and mutton, and currant cakes and sacks of flour.

SIBBY. What is it at all?

TRAMP [*mysteriously*]. Those that gave it to me wouldn't like me to tell that.

SIBBY [*to* JOHN]. Do you think is he a man that has friends among the Sidhe?

JOHN. Your mind is always running on the Sidhe since the time they made John Molloy find buried gold on the bridge of Limerick. I see nothing in it but a stone.

TRAMP. What can you see in it, you that never saw what it can do?

JOHN. What is it it can do?

TRAMP. It can do many things, and what it's going to do now is to make me a drop of broth for my dinner.

SIBBY. I'd like to have a stone that could make broth.

TRAMP. No one in the world but myself has one, ma'am, and no other stone in the world has the same power, for it has enchantment on it. All I'll ask of you now, ma'am, is the loan of a pot with a drop of boiling water in it.

SIBBY. You're welcome to that much. John, fill the small pot with water. [JOHN *fills the pot from a kettle.*

TRAMP [*putting in stone*]. There now, that's all I have to do but to put it on the fire to boil, and it's a grand pot of broth will be before me then.

SIBBY. And is that all you have to put in it?

TRAMP. Nothing at all but that—only, maybe, a bit of an herb for fear the enchantment might slip away from it. You wouldn't have a bit of Slanlus in the house, ma'am, that was cut with a black-handled knife?

SIBBY. No, indeed, I have none of that in the house.

TRAMP. Or a bit of the Fearavan that was picked when the wind was from the north?

SIBBY. No, indeed, I'm sorry there's none.

TRAMP. Or a sprig of the Athair-talav, the father of herbs?

JOHN. There's plenty of it by the hedge. I'll go out and get it for you.

TRAMP. Oh, don't mind taking so much trouble; those leaves beside me will do well enough.

[*He takes a couple of good handfuls of the cabbage and onions and puts them in.*

SIBBY. But where at all did you get the stone?

TRAMP. Well, it is how it happened. I was out one time, and a grand greyhound with me, and it followed a hare, and I went after it. And I came up at last to the edge of a gravel-pit where there were a few withered furze-bushes, and there was my fine hound sitting up, and it shivering, and a little old man sitting before him, and he taking off a hare-skin coat. [*Looking round at the ham-bone*] Give me the loan of a kippeen to stir the pot with. . . .

[*He takes the ham-bone and puts it into the pot.*

JOHN. Oh! the ham-bone!

TRAMP. I didn't say a ham-bone, I said a hare-skin coat.

SIBBY. Hold your tongue, John, if it's deaf you are getting.

TRAMP [*stirring the pot with the ham-bone*]. Well, as I was telling you he was sitting up, and one time I thought he was as small as a nut, and the next minute I thought his head to be in the stars. Frightened I was.

SIBBY. No wonder, no wonder at all in that.

TRAMP. He took the little stone then—that stone I have with me—out of the side pocket of his coat, and he showed it to me. "Call off your dog," says he, "and I'll give you that stone, and if ever you want a good drop of broth or a bit of stirabout, or a drop of poteen itself, all you have to do is to put it down in a pot with a drop of water and stir it awhile, and you'll have the thing you were wanting ready before you."

SIBBY. Poteen! Would it make that?

TRAMP. It would, ma'am; and wine, the same as the Clare Militia uses.

SIBBY. Let me see what does it look like now. [*Is bending forward.*]

TRAMP. Don't look at it for your life, ma'am. It might bring bad luck on anyone that would look at it, and it boiling. I must put a cover on the pot, or I must colour the water some way. Give me a handful of that meal.

[SIBBY *holds out a plate of meal and he puts in a handful or two.*

JOHN. Well, he is a gifted man!

SIBBY. It would be a great comfort to have a stone like that.

[*She has finished plucking the chicken, which lies in her lap.*

TRAMP. And there's another thing it does, ma'am, since it came into Catholic hands. If you put it into a pot of a Friday with a bit of the whitest meat in Ireland in it, it would turn it as black as black.

SIBBY. That is no less than a miracle. I must tell Father John about that.

TRAMP. But to put a bit of meat with it any other day of the week, it would do it no harm at all, but good. Look here now, ma'am, I'll put that nice little hen you have in your lap in the pot for a minute till you'll see. [*Takes it and puts it in.*]

JOHN [*sarcastically*]. It's a good job this is not a Friday!

SIBBY. Keep yourself quiet, John, and don't be interrupting the talk or you'll get a knock on the head like the King of Lochlann's grandmother.

JOHN. Go on, go on, I'll say no more.

TRAMP. If I'm passing this way some time of a Friday, I'll bring a nice bit of mutton, or the breast of a turkey, and you'll see how it will be no better in two minutes than a fistful of bog mould.

SIBBY [*getting up*]. Let me take the chicken out now.

TRAMP. Stop till I'll help you, ma'am, you might scald your hand. I'll show it to you in a minute as white as your own skin, where the lily and the rose are fighting for mastery. Did you ever hear what the boys in your own parish were singing after you being married from them—such of them that had any voice at all and not choked with crying, or senseless with the drop of drink they took to comfort them and to keep their wits from going, with the loss of you?

[SIBBY *sits down again complacently.*

SIBBY. Did they do that indeed?

TRAMP. They did, ma'am, this is what they used to be singing:

"Philomel, I've listened oft
To thy lay, near weeping willow"—

No, that's not it—it's a queer thing the memory is—

"'Twas at the dance at Dermody's that first I caught a sight of her."

No, that's not it either—ah, now I have it.

" My pretty Paistin is my heart's desire,
Yet I am shrunken to skin and bone."

SIBBY. Why would they call me Paistin?

TRAMP. And why wouldn't they? Would you wish them to put your right name in a song, and your man ready to knock the brains of any man will as much as look your side of the road?

SIBBY. Well, maybe so.

TRAMP. I was standing by the man that made the song, and he writing it with an old bit of a carpenter's pencil, and the tears running down—

" My pretty Paistin is my heart's desire,
Yet am I shrunken to skin and bone
For all my toil has had for its hire
Is drinking her health when lone, alone "—

[SIBBY *takes a fork and rises to take out the chicken.* TRAMP *puts his hand to stop her and goes on:*

" Oh I would think that I had my fee,
Though I am shrunken to bone and skin,
Could I but drink, my love on my knee,
Between two barrels at the inn."

[SIBBY *half rises again.* TRAMP *puts his hand upon her hand.*

TRAMP. Wait now till you hear the end [*sings*]:

" Nine nights I lay in longing sore
Between two bushes under the rain;
Thinking to meet my love once more
I cried and whistled but vain, all vain."

[*He repeats the verse,* SIBBY *singing too and beating time with fork.*

SIBBY [*to* JOHN]. I always knew I was too good for you!

[*She goes on humming.*

JOHN. Well, he has the poor woman bewitched.

SIBBY [*suddenly coming to her wits*]. Did you take the chicken out yet?

TRAMP [*taking it out and giving it a good squeeze into the pot*]. I did, ma'am. Look at it there.

[*He takes it and lays on table.*

JOHN. How is the broth getting on?

TRAMP [*tasting it with a spoon*]. It's grand. It's always grand.

SIBBY. Give me a taste of it.

TRAMP [*takes the pot off and slips the ham-bone behind him*]. Give me some vessel till I'll give this sky-woman a taste of it.

[JOHN *gives him an egg-cup, which he fills and gives to* SIBBY. JOHN *gives him a mug, and he fills this for himself, pouring it back and forward from the mug to a bowl that is on the table, and drinking gulps now and again.* SIBBY *blows at hers and smells it.*

SIBBY. There's a good smell on it, anyway. [*Tasting*] It's lovely. Oh, I'd give the world and all to have the stone that made that!

TRAMP. The world and all wouldn't buy it, ma'am. If I was inclined to sell it the Lord-Lieutenant would have given me Dublin Castle and all that's in it long ago.

SIBBY. Oh, couldn't we coax it out of you any way at all?

TRAMP [*drinking more soup*]. The whole world wouldn't coax it out of me except maybe for one thing . . . [*looks depressed*]. Now I think of it there's only one reason I might think of parting it at all.

SIBBY [*eagerly*]. What reason is that?

TRAMP. It's a misfortune that overtakes me, ma'am, every

time I make an attempt to keep a pot of my own to boil it in, and I don't like to be always under a compliment to the neighbours, asking the loan of one. But whatever way it is, I never can keep a pot with me. I had a right to ask one of the little man that gave me the stone. The last one I bought got the bottom burned out of it one night I was giving a hand to a friend that keeps a still, and the one before that I hid under a bush one time I was going into Ennis for the night, and some boys in the town dreamed about it and went looking for treasure in it, and they found nothing but eggshells, but they brought it away for all that. And another one. . . .

SIBBY. Give me the loan of the stone itself, and I'll engage I'll keep a pot for it. . . . Wait now till I'll make some offer to you. . . .

TRAMP [*aside*]. I'd best not be stopping to bargain, the priest might be coming in on me. [*Gets up.*] Well, ma'am, I'm sorry I can't oblige you. [*Goes to door, shades his eyes and looks out, turns suddenly.*] I have no time to lose, ma'am, I'm off. [*Comes to table and takes his hat.*] Well, ma'am, what offer will you make ?

JOHN. You might as well leave it for a day on trial first.

TRAMP [*to* JOHN]. I think it likely I'll not be passing this way again. [*To* SIBBY] Well, now, ma'am, as you were so kind, and for the sake of the good treatment you gave me I'll ask nothing at all for it. Here it is for you and welcome, and that you may live long to use it. But I'll just take a little bit in my bag that'll do for my supper, for fear I mightn't be in Tubber before night. [*He takes up the chicken.*] And you won't begrudge me a drop of whisky when you can make plenty for yourself from this out.

[*Takes the bottle.*

JOHN. You deserve it, you deserve it indeed. You are a very gifted man. Don't forget the kippeen!

TRAMP. It's here!

[*Slaps his pocket and exit.* JOHN *follows him.*

SIBBY [*looking at the stone in her hand*]. Broth of the best, stirabout, poteen, wine itself, he said! And the people that will be coming to see the miracle! I'll be as rich as Biddy Early before I die! [JOHN *comes back.*

SIBBY. Where were you, John?

JOHN. I just went out to shake him by the hand. He's a very gifted man.

SIBBY. He is so indeed.

JOHN. And the priest's at the top of the boreen coming for his dinner. Maybe you'd best put the stone in the pot again.

CURTAIN

A KING'S HARD BARGAIN

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Lieut.-Colonel W. P. Drury, C.B.E.

CHARACTERS

In the garden:

Harry Quick, *Leading Signalman, R.N.*
Joseph Pagett, *Reservist, Royal Marines*
Mrs Pagett, *his wife*

In the watertight compartment:

"Pincher" Martin, *Ordinary seaman, R.N.*
William Wix, Albert Shillitoe } *Privates, Royal Marines*

Scenes I and III. *The garden of the "Coach and Horses."*
Scene II. *A watertight compartment of H.M.S. "Belligerent."*
Time. *A summer evening. Present day.*

This play was produced at the Court Theatre, London, November 2, 1908, with the following cast:

In the garden:

Harry Quick . . . Mr Frederick Volpé
Joseph Pagett . . . Mr Louis Calvert
Mrs Pagett . . . . Miss Mary Brough

In the watertight compartment:

"Pincher" Martin . Mr Orlando Barnett
William Wix . . . Mr Clarence Derwent
Albert Shillitoe . . . Mr Philip Knox

Lieut.-Col. W. P. Drury (of the Royal Marines) has had an adventurous life, and naturally most of his books deal with the sea. Among his stories may be mentioned "The Passing of the Flagship," "The Shadow on the Quarter Deck," and "Men-at-Arms," while his best-known plays include "H.M.S. Missfire," "The Figurehead," "The Admiral Speaks," and "The Flag Lieutenant," the last being done in collaboration with Leo Trevor. In very different vein is "A Privy Council," which was written in collaboration with Richard Pryce. It is an excellent one-act play suggested by an amusing incident in Pepys' Diary.

A KING'S HARD BARGAIN[1]

SCENE I: *The garden of the "Coach and Horses." Enter* QUICK *up C. He raps on the table with an empty pewter.* MRS PAGETT *enters from inn R.*

QUICK. Good evenin', missis. No need to ask " 'Ow are you ? " with them Devonsheer roses a-bloomin' in your pretty face.

MRS PAGETT. Trust a sailor for something of that sort! Good evenin', Mr Signalman ; I do declare this must be a case of telepathy.

QUICK [*lighting his pipe*]. Tell 'ow much?

MRS PAGETT. Telepathy. You're the very man I've been dyin' to see all the afternoon.

QUICK. And I've been dyin' all the afternoon to get 'ere. A drop o' Scotch, if you'll be so kind, missis. You weren't dyin' simply to give me that, though—I'll lay to it.

MRS PAGETT. P'r'aps not—though 'eaven knows customers are welcome enough 'pon Dartymoor. No, I wanted to learn the meanin' o' them tall sticks you and your mates have set up 'pon tor yonder.

QUICK [*turning towards them*]. Well, that's done in three words. They're wireless telegraph masts.

MRS PAGETT. Them Maccaroni masts they tell of?

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 28–30 West 38th Street, New York.

QUICK. That's it, though we gen'rally call 'em Marconi for short.

MRS PAGETT. But what do a pack o' sailors want with it 'pon Dartymoor?

QUICK. They don't want it. They've got to 'ave it. The Naval manœuvres are on, as you may 'ave 'eard, and the Admiralty are experimentin' in wireless with the 'Ome Fleet at sea. They're thinkin' of establishin' a station 'ere.

MRS PAGETT. The 'Ome Fleet! 'Ow far off might that be?

QUICK. Pretty nigh the middle o' the bloomin' Atlantic.

MRS PAGETT. Middle o' the Atlantic! Well, I don't 'old with it—tamperin' with the power o' the Omnipotent! You mark my words, a judgment'll fall on them as does it.

QUICK. Well, well, there'll be a judgment on all of us some day. [*His eye catches the name on the signboard.*] "Joseph Pagett—Joseph Pagett!" Now, I wonder——

MRS PAGETT. Where my husband is? Then I'll tell you. He's been in to Plymouth Barracks for his annual training, and I expect him back every minute.

QUICK [*thoughtfully*]. He's a Reservist of the Marines, ain't he? As a matter o' fact, I was wondering if he'd ever served aboard the *Andrew Mash* in China.

MRS PAGETT. "Andromasher" they pronounce it, being a French name. But what if he has?

QUICK [*with a grin*]. If he's the same Private Pagett what borrowed three 'alf-crowns off me, and misremembered to return 'em, I should like to meet him again, that's all!

MRS PAGETT [*frigidly*]. Then if you expect to meet him here you'll be disappointed. *My* Joseph—[*pointing to sign*]—happens to be the model licensed victualler quoted at every Brewster Sessions, and a churchwarden highly thought of by the Bishop of the Diocese. So there!

QUICK. Then of course they couldn't be the same.

MRS PAGETT. I'm glad to see that—— [*Turns to take off tray into the house, and sees* PAGETT *off L.*] But, talking of heroes, here he comes.

[*Enter* PAGETT *in blue serge tunic, dusty, hot, and irritable, up C.* MRS PAGETT, *having dropped the tray in the porch, runs to meet him.*

Well, 'ow are you?

PAGETT. 'Ot and tired! Give us a kiss, missis—there!—and a drink!

MRS PAGETT. Shandygaff as usual, Joe?

PAGETT. As usual, my dear. [*Unbuckles belt, and hangs it on nail beside porch L.*] As usual. [*Exit* MRS PAGETT, *R.*

QUICK [*aside*]. If it ain't Joe Pagett of the *Andrew Mash* it's his twin brother with the same tally. [*Aloud*] Too 'aughty now, I suppose, Mr Churchwarden—[PAGETT *turns suddenly*]—to recognize an old shipmate.

PAGETT. What? 'Arry? A leading signalman, too! [*Shakes hands.*] 'Owever did they come to make *you* a petty orficer?

QUICK [*pointedly*]. After the *Andrew Mash* paid off, and I was no longer 'andicapped by evil companions, I 'ad a chance of risin' in my perfession.

[*Both come well down stage with their backs to the inn.*

PAGETT. Lord love us! What wonders men see who go down to the deep in first-class cruisers! To think that the Ordinary Seaman as I used to go ashore with on general leave in Yokohama—— [*Nudging him and winking*] D'you mind the Hundred an' One Steps at Yokohama, 'Arry?

[*Unperceived by the pair, enter* MRS PAGETT *from inn R. with whisky in glass and tankard of shandygaff.*

QUICK [*gloomily*]. I mind, and how you used to kiss Otakisan behind the bloomin' temple.

PAGETT [*with a smirk*]. It wasn't my fault if she preferred the British Army.

QUICK. They're all alike. A simple sailor man ain't in it, when a soldier's about in his red coat and 'elmet. You 'ad to keep the Moosmie gals off with a stick!

PAGETT [*chuckling*]. Not me—I liked it! They used to 'ang about me, bless 'em, like flies round a honey-pot.

MRS PAGETT. Did they!! Any'ow, we'll drop the subject for the present. But—to-night, Joe!

QUICK [*grinning*]. To-night, Joe.

PAGETT. See what you've done, with your silly sailor talk of temples and what all. [*Organ heard off.*] Hallo! This ain't choir practice night, surely?

MRS PAGETT. No. But to-morrow's Lifeboat Sunday, so there's a special practice this evening to run through the sea hymns. They're so seldom sung, you know.

PAGETT. Same old yarn. "Out of sight, out of mind" with the Navy.

MRS PAGETT. More's the shame, as I was just saying to Loveday Yeo.

PAGETT. The maid's been here, then?

MRS PAGETT. Yes, to give me a bit of news on her way to the practice. She's going to be married, Joe.

PAGETT. Who's the 'appy bridegroom select?

MRS PAGETT. He's a private serving aboard the *Belligerent.*

QUICK. The *Belligerent*? Why, she's one o' the 'Ome Fleet off the Azores yonder. What's his tally?

MRS PAGETT. Albert Shillitoe!

PAGETT. Orlbert Shillitoe!

MRS PAGETT. D'you know him, then?

PAGETT. Know him! Look 'ere, I don't say as I wish him any positive 'arm, mind you. But—I'd like to see him paralysed all down his right side.

QUICK. You weren't exac'ly chums then, I reckon?

PAGETT. Chums! Is it likely you'd be chums with a lop-eared leper what's continually guessin' your most secret thoughts what you don't even tell the missis?

QUICK [*to* MRS PAGETT]. Telepathy runs in the family, seemin'ly.

PAGETT [*suspiciously*]. I don't know what you mean by that, though you've got its scientific tally right enough. Telepathy's what they call it.

QUICK [*to* MRS PAGETT]. Sort o' wireless tele-graphy, between two parties, I s'pose?

MRS PAGETT. That's it. Thought readin', to put it plainly.

PAGETT. You may put it any way you've a mind to. An exasperatin' phenomeno's the way *I* puts it.

QUICK. 'Ow do you mean?

PAGETT. Why, when we was thousands o' miles apart on diff'rent stations, I've dreamt that I've seen him—as nat'ral as it might be you now—sometimes in liquor, but gen'rally in cells——

QUICK. 'Ere, don't you go comparin' me with 'im!

PAGETT [*waving him aside*]. On the other 'and, he would dream, quite as nat'ral, that he saw me doin' some galliant and 'eroic deed. [*Poking* QUICK *with his forefinger*] When we come to compare dates afterwards, we used to find our respectful dreams 'ad been true! What's the meanin' of it all?

QUICK. Birds of a feather gen'rally——

PAGETT. Thank you for the insinooation, Mister 'Arry Quick, Har N. He was the worst King's 'Ard Bargain in a ship that was manned with 'em!

MRS PAGETT. A King's 'Ard Bargain?

QUICK. A man that takes the King's pay, missis, but shirks the King's job.

MRS PAGETT. I haven't been on the married strength for

nigh on twenty years without knowin' that, Mr Quick. [*Going up towards inn*] But, from all Loveday told me, it don't apply to Orlbert Shillitoe, that's all!

PAGETT. You don't know him as well as what I do, my dear.

MRS PAGETT. You're prejudiced by that there telepathy, Joe. P'r'aps he hasn't had his chance yet. I shouldn't wonder, in spite o' you both, if Loveday's promised husband didn't turn out to be a hero some day. [*Exit into inn.*

QUICK. Lord love 'em! They think everything in a red coat must be an 'ero. [*Going up stage.*]

PAGETT [*indignantly*]. From King to drummer, a man never knows where he is with the female sect.

QUICK. Hallo! My mates are signallin' to me. [*Stares with shaded eyes, then through telescope at signal station off L.*] "In-touch-with-flagship-important." I must be off!

[*He closes glass with a snap and rushes off L.*

PAGETT [*yawning*]. The Adm'ral wants some more white paint and gold-leaf sent out to him, I s'pose. What about supper, missis?

MRS PAGETT [*returning*]. I'm going to see about it now.

[PAGETT *coming down stage, hums: "A life on the ocean wave, a home on the rolling deep——"*

MRS PAGETT [*as she goes towards inn*]. Afterwards you and I will have a little talk, Joe.

PAGETT. Eh? [*Humming*] "Where the——"

MRS PAGETT [*from porch*]. About the *Andromashee*, Joe.

PAGETT. Oh! [*Humming*] "And the winds their vigil keep."

MRS PAGETT. And Japanese temples, *Joseph!* [*Exit.*

PAGETT [*with a groan, as he throws himself down on bench*]. To-night of all nights! When I'm too dog tired to invent fairy-tales for her! Heigh-ho!

SCENE II: *He yawns, stretches himself, and settles down to sleep. In the distance the organ is swelling out the sea hymn, "Fierce raged the tempest," and the church clock drowsily chimes the four quarters. As soon as* PAGETT *is asleep the stage is gradually darkened, until the scene is entirely blacked out. A front gauze is dropped, and the watertight compartment lowered from the flies. It is a boxed-in set, with a practicable watertight door R and L. In the centre is a large steel rack filled with the seamen's canvas bags. On each bulkhead is an electric light, and a coffer-dam is painted along all three sides of the compartment. The overhead deck is intersected by steel girders, the bulkheads by* T*-irons, and all are studded with steel bolts. The entire set is made of canvas stretched on battens, the above details being painted thereon. The rack, which is neatly packed with actual bags, is constructed of wood, and is lowered from the flies.*

Meanwhile the distant murmur of the village gradually changes to the busy sounds of a man-of-war. The muffled thunder of the organ merges into the hum and throb of the dynamo. The drowsy chimes are followed by eight staccato strokes in sea fashion upon the ship's bell. The lights are gradually raised, the stage to be fully illuminated as eight bells are struck. From the flies overhead are heard—slightly muffled—the pipe and hoarse call of a bos'n's mate: "Clear up decks!" There is a rush of feet, the noise of ropes being flung down on the decks, and the sea cries of "Aft all the Marines! Come, bear a hand there. Cover guns!" etc., etc.

SHILLITOE *is discovered asleep on the deck R.* WIX, *who is on sentry, is slowly pacing backwards and forwards in front. The former is in a blue serge tunic, which is unbuttoned and shows his grey flannel shirt. His cap is lying beside*

him. The sentry is smartly dressed in a blue serge, webbing waist-belt and bayonet, and forage cap with a white top. Enter MARTIN *L. He is in a white working suit of duck, is barefooted, and wears a white cap cover.*

WIX [*halting to mop his face*]. It's crool 'ot!

MARTIN [*doing ditto*]. I b'lieve yer. [*Indicating* SHILLITOE] Is yonder a seagoin' sallymander that's picked out this pit o' Tophet for a sleeping berth?

WIX [*grinning*]. It's been picked out for him, and bloomin' well serve him right. He's a prisoner under my charge at present; to-morrow he goes into cells.

MARTIN. Who is he?

WIX. Number one ought four seven Private Orlbert Shillitoe.

MARTIN. What's the pore feller's crime?

WIX. Sleepin' on his post with his toonic for a pillow, and 'anging his boots on the 'andle of the Captain's cabin door!

MARTIN. Cells for that! I wonder what he'd 'ave got if he'd hung hisself on the sacred 'andle.

[*The pipe and hoarse call of a bos'n's mate are heard above, followed by the hooting of a fog-horn along the decks, the rush of many feet, and the thud of closing doors.* SHILLITOE *sits up, and all three listen to these sounds, which in the compartment are somewhat muffled.*

SHILLITOE. It's "Close watertight doors!"

MARTIN. Why not? It's the routine. It's got to be done once in every watch.

WIX. That's right enough. But what did they want to do it twice for? They closed 'em not more than 'alf an hour ago.

SHILLITOE. To worry the 'ands, most like. That's the way mutinies are made.

[*Three or four hands—supers—race through the compartment, banging to and clipping the doors behind them. They pass behind the bag rack, and consequently fail to see the three men who are in front.*

MARTIN [*pulling a bag out of the rack and sitting down on it*]. That's a little bit of orl right. I couldn't join the working party now, not if I wanted to ever so.

WIX. Oh, that's your little game, is it? Well, you'll find there's one sentry in the Royal Marines, any'ow, as don't shirk his dooty.

MARTIN. 'Ow d'you mean?

WIX. I'll report you after the evolution, my son, to the sergeant o' the guard, for skulkin' from your work and bein' in an onlawful place.

MARTIN. Oh, you will, will you? [*Turning back the sleeves of his jumper*] Then I'll 'ave full value for my money by layin' out a sentry first.

[*He begins to spar at* WIX, *when a dull shock is heard, and the three men are thrown off their feet.*

SHILLITOE [*rubbing himself*]. She's took the ground!

MARTIN [*hoarsely*]. She's in collision! It's no drill this time, chums. The sooner we're out o' this rat-trap—[*springing to his feet*]—the better it'll be for our gracious King and country. . . .

SHILLITOE. Back with them clips, lads. There ain't no time to lose.

[*They rush to doors,* WIX *R.,* SHILLITOE *and* MARTIN *L., and try to force back steel clips which hold them.*

WIX [*nervously*]. I can't move mine the least part of an inch.

SHILLITOE [*with desperation*]. Damnation! No more can't we!

MARTIN [*desisting in despair*]. Nor won't neither, not if we was to try till Judgment Day.

WIX [*irritably*]. You've been bloomin' cocksure, and proved wrong, before to-day, "Pincher."

MARTIN. The ship's begun to list already, and when 'cavy steel doors like these get thrown out o' the perpendicular——

WIX. Oh, my Gawd, 'ark to that!

[*A sound of grinding and rending metal and of rushing water is heard. Panicstricken, they batter on doors and shout for help.*

ALL. Outside, there! Bear a hand! Open these bloomin' doors, can't you?

MARTIN. There'll be trouble over this, if ever we get out. Some one's made the First Lootenant's paint-work all bloody with his knuckles.

SHILLITOE [*with a laugh*]. We needn't worry. The First Lootenant 'll never set eyes on this bit o' paint-work no more.

MARTIN. Nor on us, for that matter, not if he lives to be a hundred.

WIX. 'Ere, let's all 'ave a go at this door.

[*They shout and hammer with renewed frenzy.*

SHILLITOE [*flinging away from the door*]. What the blazes is the good of it all? There's no one in either of the next compartments, and we can't be 'eard on deck.

MARTIN. They're too busy gettin' out the collision mat for one thing.

SHILLITOE [*hopelessly*]. Besides, who supposes we're here? The chaps who closed the doors didn't see us. They'd report the flats all clear.

WIX. She's listing more 'eavily every moment.

[*Three or four bags slip from the rack, which meanwhile has been slightly tilted forward by stage hands behind it.*

WIX [*beating his hands upon the door*]. If only I was up there with the rest of 'em in the blessed air an' sunlight, I could face it like a man. [*He breaks down.*

SHILLITOE [*placing hand on his shoulder*]. It'll soon be over, lad—Gawd—there goes the light!

[*Darken stage. Hum of dynamo stops—two or three dull explosions heard off, bags slip from rack, sound of shuffling and skidding of feet on sharply canted deck.*

MARTIN. Lord 'ave mercy upon us! She's goin' down!

[*After a few seconds of darkness and silence, during which* PAGETT *is for a brief instant seen still asleep outside the inn, a match is struck—lights on slightly—revealing stariled face of* SHILLITOE. *He gropes about for fallen emergency lantern, finds it, and lights its great candle—lights half up, limelight on group—*SHILLITOE *holds lantern aloft, discovering prostrate forms of* WIX *and* MARTIN, *all the bags strewn on the deck, and various other indications that the ship is on sea bed.*

SHILLITOE [*in a hoarse whisper*]. Is—is anyone else—alive?

MARTIN [*weakly*]. Alive! Saints in 'eaven, I'd be 'appy if I was bein' drownded up topsides with the rest o' the ship's comp'ny!

WIX [*solemnly*]. It's a judgment on you, chum, for skulkin' where you didn't ought.

MARTIN. It's a crool 'ard judgment for a crime as would have got me seven days 10 A at most.

WIX [*hysterically*]. Don't say there's no 'ope, chums! I'm only a recruity—it ain't fair that I should be a casuality so young. Surely our Admiral ain't the sort to steam away and leave three pore seamen an' Marines alive at the bottom o' the sea? [*Pause; frantically, at receiving no response*] You're the sailorman, "Pincher," you know what'd happen.

They'll send down divers to get us out, won't they, "Pincher," chum?

MARTIN [*very quietly*]. My pore lad, as well make up your mind to face it first as last. All the seamanship in the Navy could no more 'elp us than what a infants' school could.

[WIX *covers his face with his hands, and sobs quietly.*

SHILLITOE [*with forced gaiety to* MARTIN]. 'Ow long, Mr "Pincher" Know-all, Es-quire, do you calc'late the air in this 'igh-class mausoleum will last us?

MARTIN [*moodily*]. It's a simple enough sum in cubic measure and rule o' three. As he'll never know of it, pore feller, I'll do it on the First Lootenant's paint-work.

[*He writes with pencil on watertight door.*

WIX [*after a pause*]. 'Ow does it work out, chum?

MARTIN. With only three of us to ex'aust the air in this 'ermetically closed compartment, I figger it that we may linger the best part of five hours before we—before——

[*All cough nervously.*

And that 'alf-inch o' pusser's dip in the lantern is good for ten minutes at the outside!

WIX. Ten minutes substracted from four hours leaves——

SHILLITOE [*fiercely*]. An eternity of 'ell! For the Lord's sake, let's overhaul the bags—there's bound to be a pack o' cards in one o' them. If we don't do something we shall go mad!

WIX. Even if we found any, I, for one, shouldn't 'ave the 'eart to play. Come to think of it, 'twould be more fitting if we prayed.

MARTIN. That's right enough. But who knows the detail?

SHILLITOE. Pity the Chapl'in ain't 'ere, he's a fair masterpiece at it!

MARTIN. I see him pass through on his way to the sick bay, just before they closed watertight doors.

SHILLITOE. Crool 'ard, ain't it, that he should have missed bein' with us by about 'alf a minute?

WIX [*nervously*]. In loo of the parson, chums, I can mind a bit o' that routine prayer what's read ev'ry mornin' on the quarter-deck.

MARTIN. It can't do us no 'arm to 'ear it. It's for the last time of askin', as the sayin' is.

[*There is a moment's pause.*

SHILLITOE [*crossing to* WIX, *and laying his hand on his shoulder*]. Carry on, chum.

WIX [*kneeling on bags*]. "Preserve us from the dangers o' the sea and from the vi'lence o' the enemy; that we may be a safeguard unto our most gracious Sovereign Lord the King and his dominions, and a security for such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions."

ALL. Amen!

MARTIN. Tch! I reckon we've done with all that now. A prayer for the dyin' 'ud be more suitable-like.

SHILLITOE. Would it? None of us, I'll lay to it, did much in the praying line while Death was out of sight to le'ward. Now that he's got the weather gauge it seems a bit pitiful to whine to the Almighty about it.

MARTIN [*thoughtfully*]. It never struck me that way before.

SHILLITOE. We've each got womenfolk at 'ome, Gawd 'elp 'em! When they hear of this 'ere casuality, depend upon it they'll make out a better case for us than we've the wits to do for ourselves.

MARTIN. Aye, it comes nat'ral to a woman, don't it, to tell pretty fairy-tales about a—man she's fond of.

[*A moment's silence, emphasized by the quiet sobbing of* WIX.

SHILLITOE [*suddenly springing to his feet*]. Lord, to think that I'd nearly forgot it!

MARTIN *and* WIX. What?

SHILLITOE. Shipmates, I've a bit o' news as'll hearten you up more than a double tot o' rum apiece!

WIX. A—a chance?

SHILLITOE. Not an earthly. Death's got his fingers at our throats, and bloomin' well means to keep 'em there till he's choked the life out of us. We'd have to face that much one day or other in any case.

WIX [*piteously*]. But not in the dark, not in the chokin' dark.

SHILLITOE. Dark or sunshine, my pore lad, we can now snap our own fingers at him in return. I've something 'ere —[*fumbles in trouser pocket*]—that'll make Death so gentle he won't know hisself from his twin brother Sleep.

[*Produces small blue phial with orange label.*

MARTIN. Lord forgive you for a liar! 'Tis nothin' but a lotion.

SHILLITOE. A lotion! It's laudanum, lads, blessed laudanum! I pinched it this mornin' from the sick bay, while I was waitin' to be examined for cells.

MARTIN. Pinched it? 'Ow?

SHILLITOE. The poison cupboard 'appened to be unlocked, so—— [*Illustrating by dumb show.*

MARTIN [*admiringly*]. You always was 'andy with your fingers, Orlbert. What did you want it for?

SHILLITOE [*wearily*]. To deaden the damned monotony of ten days' cells, I s'pose.

WIX [*after a pause*]. 'Ow much is a—a fatal dose, as the sayin' is?

SHILLITOE. Ah! The sick-bay stooard warned me o' that when he gave me a drop one day for the toothache. One o' they doses—[*taps bottle*]—he says, is *just enough* to do the trick. Nothing would wake a man then but the last Trump o' Tattoo. Let's get at the light, chum, and I'll serve out a tot all round.

[*He holds the phial before the lantern, and silently counts the doses—"One, two"—then stops, with a sharp intake of his breath.*

MARTIN [*tensely*]. What's wrong?

SHILLITOE [*still staring at phial*]. Nothing.

WIX [*in alarm*]. Ain't there enough?

SHILLITOE [*quietly*]. Plenty for all—of you. Who's the youngest? Wix, your pipe.

[WIX *produces pipe, into bowl of which* SHILLITOE *carefully measures the first dose.*

That's right. Next man—"Pincher."

[MARTIN *holds out his, into which* SHILLITOE *empties the phial.*

[WIX *lifts his unsteadily to his lips;* SHILLITOE *lays a restraining hand on his arm.*

My lad, you've forgot something.

WIX [*after a moment's consideration*]. The King!

MARTIN *and* WIX. The King! Gawd bless him!

[*Both drink the loyal toast,* SHILLITOE *meanwhile standing at the salute.*

SHILLITOE. Aye, Gawd bless him!

WIX [*to* SHILLITOE]. But your tot? You ain't drunk it.

SHILLITOE [*quietly dropping the phial*]. That's all right. There were only two.

[MARTIN *snatches up the phial, holds it before lantern, and turns it upside down.* WIX *examines it in silence, then realizing his sacrifice, both wring his hand, and turn away to hide their feelings.*

WIX [*wonderingly, still holding his hand*]. You did that for us, chum?

SHILLITOE [*with a short laugh*]. It's nothing. Ever since I was a nipper in the Drums I've been, first a Queen's, then a King's, 'Ard Bargain. I'd like to find one decent entry on my defaulter sheet when I get Topsides.

WIX [*turning away, his face in his hands*]. Gawd bless you, chum, and—good night!

SHILLITOE [*gravely*]. Same to you, comrades both! [*As they sink back upon the bags in attitudes of abandonment, he drops into a sitting posture—his elbows on his knees, his face between his palms, and stares into the lantern.*] A Private of Marines ain't expected to live like a gentleman. But at least he can die like one.

[*Lantern flame flickers and goes out.*

SCENE III: *Darken stage. Church chimes and organ heard pp., then crescendo to p. Bags and rack-set and gauze fly'd. Lights full up. Discover garden set as in Scene I.* PAGETT *is still asleep, he stirs, wakes, and sits up with horror depicted on his face. Enter* QUICK *hurriedly U. C., pauses, and crosses R. to* PAGETT.

QUICK [*to* PAGETT]. That there signal I was called away for —there's bad news—damned bad!

PAGETT [*still dazed, and staring straight before him into the auditorium*]. The *Belligerent* has been in collision, and gone down.

QUICK. Good God! How did you know that? I've come straight from the signal station as fast as my legs would bring me.

PAGETT [*dreamily*]. There's quicker ways even than your wireless. I've been aboard myself.

QUICK. You mean—you and Shillitoe?

PAGETT [*in a hoarse whisper*]. Shillitoe's gone down with her.

[PAGETT, *rising to his feet, appears to gaze intently at something invisible passing across the auditorium. Mechanically he brings his right hand to the salute.*

QUICK [*following his gaze*]. Who passes, shipmate?

PAGETT [*solemnly*]. A King's Hard Bargain!

[*The organ swells out the sea hymn "Eternal Father, strong to save," as the curtain slowly falls.*

CURTAIN